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7711th meeting
Friday, 10 June 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Ayrault/Mr. Delattre	(France)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Japan	Mr. Hamachi
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ndiaye
	Spain	Mr. Ybáñez
	Ukraine	Mr. Kyslytsya/Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Cancela
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Protecting civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2016/447)

Letter dated 27 May 2016 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2016/503)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Protecting civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2016/447)

Letter dated 27 May 2016 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2016/503)

The President (*spoke in French*): I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, the Ministers and other representatives present in today's meeting. Their participation is an affirmation of the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, the Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Djibouti, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Ireland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Maldives, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Nepal, the Netherlands, the Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, and thank him for attending this important meeting in person. I request the Protocol Officer to escort him to his seat at the Council table.

Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. Maurer, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and His Excellency Mr. Téte António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/447, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I wish to also draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/503, which contains a letter dated 27 May 2016 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, whom I warmly thank for all his efforts as Secretary-General. I have met with him frequently, and I know that he spares no effort in travelling wherever the work of the Organization takes him, with the exclusive aim of keeping the peace and protecting civilians.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to address this important subject.

(*spoke in English*)

This is the right moment to address the contributions of United Nations peace operations to the protection of civilians. My latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2016/447) underlines the urgent need for concrete measures and makes recommendations to that end. Enhancing the protection of civilians was a key focus of the World Humanitarian Summit and the

Agenda for Humanity (A/70/709, annex). It was one of the dominant themes to emerge from the recent reviews of peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture, and the women, peace and security framework.

These reports, reviews and events all stressed the political, legal, moral and operational imperative of protecting civilians and the primary responsibility of national authorities. They underscored the modest but vital role that United Nations peace operations can play in protecting civilians, and they stressed the need for a concerted effort by the Council, Member States and the Secretariat to further strengthen this contribution.

Protecting civilians is an overarching responsibility, involving all the critical functions of the United Nations: human rights, humanitarian, political and peacekeeping. In the same way, peacekeeping operations are most effective in protecting civilians when protection is considered a mission-wide activity, driven by a sound political strategy. The political engagement of civilian staff and their dialogue with the parties to conflict-affected communities and with partners is essential. Civilian staff also monitor and investigate abuses — which is the only basis for accountability. Likewise, United Nations police make an important contribution. United Nations police are currently protecting tens of thousands of internally displaced people at peacekeeping mission bases in South Sudan.

I urge the Security Council to give precedence to political strategy and whole-of-mission approaches when it considers mandates to protect civilians. Those can be even more critical than military assets and troop numbers. The Secretariat is working to support the Council in this by providing better analysis of threats and better advice and recommendations on the most effective course of action, depending on the context. As I told the General Assembly yesterday, we are reviewing our administrative and logistical procedures to see how we can best support peace operations, and looking at policies to make us more flexible and responsive.

The Secretariat is also doing its utmost to support missions through a renewed focus on performance and accountability. We will continue our efforts to prevent and address abuses committed by peacekeepers. Working with troop and police contributors, we are generating peacekeeping forces and police in a way that matches capabilities with requirements. We need troops that speak the right languages, bring with them the right technology and equipment and have the right skills and training, in the right places. Member States have a critical role in that regard, in contributing troops and police who are ready, willing and able to take up protection duties. The Kigali Principles set out critical benchmarks for troop- and police-contributing countries, and I urge all States to endorse them.

We also rely on the Security Council to set mandates that are in line with resources and to use its influence to increase those resources in certain circumstances.

Protecting civilians is a United Nations system-wide responsibility. But the primary responsibility lies with parties to a conflict, non-belligerent States and the Security Council. My Agenda for Humanity, drawn up as the framework for the World Humanitarian Summit, sets out core responsibilities, principles, courses of action and ambitious targets for all to improve the protection of civilians. At the Summit, Governments, non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies and others pledged to take concrete actions to implement the Agenda. Later this year, I will report to the General Assembly and propose ways to take those commitments forward.

We must also look outside the United Nations and increase our engagement with civil society, non-governmental organizations and regional partners. In the Central African Republic, for example, the United Nations has been coordinating a group of international partners, including the African Union and the Economic Community of Central African States, to promote stability and security. We will also continue pressing Governments and parties to conflict to uphold their protection responsibilities, comply with international law and take precautions to prevent harm to civilians — for example, by minimizing the impact of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Governments and parties to conflict also have an obligation to provide for the basic needs of civilians in conflict. When they fail to do so, they should facilitate principled humanitarian assistance by humanitarian organizations. Many parties are failing to live up to those obligations, and it is essential that we use all the means at our disposal to hold them accountable.

The United Nations is determined to work collectively to support Governments to protect their people, and to persuade parties to conflict to abide by their obligations. But even the most effective peacekeeping can never protect every civilian from harm. No amount of strategy, resources or accountability will mitigate the grave and tragic consequences of war for ordinary women, children and men. The ultimate solution to protecting civilians in conflict is to find sustainable political solutions based on the rule of law and human rights standards. That is the core responsibility of the Security Council, and I urge the Council to exercise it.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic.

President Touadera (*spoke in French*): This meeting of the Security Council is taking place at an opportune moment, in that it is focused on the question of peacekeeping operations and the protection of civilians. I believes it affords us an opportunity to discuss the case of my country — the Central African Republic — which hosts an international peacekeeping operation on its territory that has ensured the protection of civilians for some time now.

With the support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the European Union-led peacekeeping force in the Central African Republic, the European Union Military Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic and Operation Sangaris, the Transitional Government was able quickly to put an end to mass atrocities. The security environment was also conducive to the success of popular consultations, the Bangui Forum, the referendum and the parliamentary and presidential elections. I would especially like to thank MINUSCA and the entire United Nations system for its efforts to protect civilians throughout our territory — from Paoua to Obo and from Berbérati to Birao. The effects of those efforts are particularly evident in the return of displaced persons and refugees populations, which has accelerated in recent months, for example in Bangui, Berbérati and Kaga Bandoro.

In spite of that strategic success, the task remains enormous, while the capabilities of MINUSCA, combined with those of the security forces of the Central African Republic, are unfortunately to date insufficient to put an end to the violence affecting our citizens. The continued presence of armed groups — whether anti-Balaka or ex-Séléka — as well as that of the Lord's Resistance Army, poses a daily challenge to the security of civilians. Added to that are the ongoing inter-communal tensions, including with regard to herding migration, which are being fuelled by the presence of those groups.

The grass-roots consultations as well as the Bangui Forum accorded significant attention to the issue of victims, who were able to share their views and their expectations. Displaced populations and ethnic and religious minorities are at particular risk of violence, while women and children all too often suffer from gender-based violence and are victims of recruitment by armed groups. The refugees from the Central African Republic want to go back to their country, and they want there to be a return to justice, reconciliation among communities, freedom of movement and peace.

Against a backdrop of heightened vulnerability due to a drop in agricultural production, forced displacement, rampant crime and the still too great number of atrocities being committed by armed groups, we together must do more and better to protect the population throughout the breadth of the country. In the immediate term, and this is the number one priority of my Government, the Central African Republic needs the unwavering support of the international community, particularly of MINUSCA, to protect populations sustainably. That is why the protection of civilians must remain the priority mandate of MINUSCA and be carried out in support of Government action.

In order to guarantee such protection, particular support from the international community is needed to equip and train our personnel and enable them to fulfil their primary responsibility in respect of protection and security. First and foremost, the Central African Republic must first rebuild its army, gendarmerie and police, in addition to its judicial and correctional system. This will require the establishment of professional, honest, equipped, trained operational structures that are representative of all segments of the population.

Coordination of security operations must be strengthened, and joint operations, particularly with the internal security forces, can enable our forces to benefit immediately from rapid response capacities and contribute directly to the security of the population. These operations will make it possible to apprehend the perpetrators of mass crimes, as well as criminals or even armed groups that continue to violate the rights of citizens. These security operations must be carried out in support of a political process focused on political solutions, disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration, and security sector reform in order to contain and gradually reduce the presence and negative action of armed groups.

In order to have a lasting impact, our joint security efforts must, of course, be sustained and extended by continued work towards national reconciliation, justice and the fight against impunity and, more broadly, towards the restoration of State authority and the promotion of human rights throughout the country. These actions aimed at establishing a protective environment must remain a priority in the mandate of MINUSCA, and be undertaken primarily in areas where insecurity persists.

The deployment of administration throughout the national territory is absolutely vital to providing the population with basic social services so as to effectively contribute to national reconciliation and the restoration of State authority, as well as to respond to the marginalization that fuels the country's cycles of crises. The Government is resolved to undertake a major reform of the decentralization policy in order to help the population govern itself better, by asserting its presence throughout the entire country and meeting the basic needs of the citizens of the Central African Republic.

At this point, I wish to express the Government's gratitude to the international community for its support in restoring the authority of the State. This support has enabled the redeployment of 16 prefects, 71 sub-prefects and 174 special delegations, as well as of 425 staff professionals working in social services, 70 per cent of whom work in the education sector. However, I note that, in the context of restoring the authority of the State and protecting civilian populations in the Central African Republic, strengthening the functional and operational capacities of the police and gendarmerie also remains a priority. In this context, the internal security forces, with the support of the MINUSCA police component, have developed a plan for capacity building and development that deserves to be implemented.

Here, I would like to highlight the Government's efforts to engage all Central Africans on the path of reconciliation and forgiveness, bearing in mind that justice must be served in order to combat impunity and promote human rights. By combining the referral to the International Criminal Court with the establishment of a strengthened specific national mechanism, the Central African Republic has recently blazed a new trail in the fight against impunity. However, it is important for the international community to provide us, as soon as possible, with experts and international judges with real experience in prosecuting the most serious crimes. Furthermore, the imminent establishment of a national human rights commission, in accordance with international standards, will enable my country to take a crucial step in this area.

In addition, the establishment of the Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Reparation Commission recommended at the Bangui Forum will also enable the country to lay the foundations of lasting peace. The consolidation of public finances and reform of the productive sectors will be among the major pursuits of this new presidential term. It will be a major reform of State-owned financial agencies to increase and secure State resources and contain public spending. A relentless battle will be waged against fraud, corruption, embezzlement and extortion.

In the same spirit, the Government will relaunch the productive sectors — agriculture, trade, energy, private foreign investment, public/private partnership — in order to stimulate growth and ensure not only food security but also increased exports and reduction of imports. Social measures to combat unemployment, improve the professionalization of the educational system and enhance access to health care, medication and housing are envisaged.

The various gains made have required the support and assistance of the international community. Such support should continue in a framework of mutual engagement with international partners in the Central African Republic to support its Government and people in implementing the nationally agreed priorities of peace and security, justice and reconciliation, the restoration of State authority, and social and economic development. Our hope is that the framework of mutual engagement focuses on the immediate challenges.

Priorities for recovery and long-term development will be taken into account in a framework in the style of the New Deal, of which the Central African Republic is a pilot country. The Government will undertake an assessment of recovery and peacebuilding with the joint support of the United Nations, the European Union and the World Bank. The assessment will make it possible to formulate a priority national action plan for recovery and peacebuilding at the donor meeting to be organized by the European Union in Brussels in November.

These are the topics that I wanted to present to the Security Council. I express the hope that the international community will provide its support for the actions included in the Central African Republic's agenda for recovery.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank President Touadera for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Maurer.

Mr. Maurer: I thank the Council for giving me the opportunity to address it again in this important debate today.

War equals destruction — the destruction of the enemy, of military targets, of assets and of infrastructure. It might be regrettable, but it is not prohibited under international humanitarian law and therefore has to be accepted. What we cannot accept — what we must not accept — is that war destroys the lives of countless civilians. The protection of civilians lies at the heart of international humanitarian law and at the heart of the missions of both the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Peacekeepers are often deployed on the front lines of armed conflict with increasingly robust mandates. We know this because in many places, from South Sudan to Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the ICRC works right alongside them. Since the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone in 1999, the Organization's mandates have increasingly included the protection of civilians, and I commend the Council for its commitment to using the resources at its disposal to ensure that people affected by conflict are spared whenever and however possible.

The deployment of peace missions in violent environments, with robust mandates, inevitably raises the question of when and under which conditions international humanitarian law applies to them. I believe that this legal discussion of a technical nature should not preclude anyone from aiming for the highest standards, at all times, and that means impeccable respect for international humanitarian law.

The more than 120,000 members of the United Nations forces form, in theory, the world's third largest army, and they are standard setters. Their exposure to some of the worst atrocities in human history, from Rwanda to Bosnia, from South Sudan to the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Somalia today, means that their actions can make a difference in the most difficult situations. They are held to the highest of standards, and where they fail, for whatever reason, the Council, as the organ responsible for establishing peacekeeping missions, must draw the appropriate conclusions and act on them in cooperation with the troop-contributing countries concerned, including on allegations of sexual violence against children and the murder of civilians, which have recently received media attention.

All delegations know that the ICRC works on the front lines of armed conflicts around the world, and my organization is often among the last international humanitarian actors staying on the ground, close to the people. What we know from being close to people, in over 80 countries, is that communities possess tremendous strengths, particularly in times of fragility and emergency. Neither humanitarians nor peacekeepers must limit or prevent the empowerment of people. After all, it is the people in the communities who know their environment and the changing dynamics best. I have myself seen remarkable examples of local men and women negotiating access for humanitarian organizations, for instance. There is a role for peacekeepers in community engagement, as the Secretary-General also highlighted ahead of today's meeting. Peacekeepers must create and support those spaces in which locals can negotiate.

As close as peacekeepers and humanitarians are to each other geographically in the field, it is of vital importance for the ICRC to be perceived and understood as the strictly neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian organization that it is. Any kind of confusion or blurring between the political mandate of peacekeeping missions and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's principles can potentially jeopardize our access to people in need and risk the lives of my colleagues. We will continue to protect our distinctiveness so as to ensure that we can deliver to the best of our abilities to people suffering in wars, and we ask peacekeepers and the Council to do the same. We will continue to rely on our own security protocols, which are not based on weaponized security, but on engagement with and consensus among all those bearing arms, and transparency about our strictly needs-based action. We also want to continue to work with peacekeeping missions, troop- and police-contributing countries and the United Nations Secretariat to further build on the fruitful cooperation that we have established over decades.

We are ready to increase in volume and depth our training programmes on international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians for peacekeepers, ahead of deployment and in theatre, and to strengthen our protection dialogue with all parties. We are ready to engage on the front lines of conflict and with all those bearing arms to find arrangements through which civilians are protected and international humanitarian law is respected. Often the first step towards better protection is by rebuilding minimal trust among belligerents across contact lines.

Through our substantial experience in the area of detention, we can assist the Council in preparing for those moments when peacekeepers will likely have to arrest and detain persons. We have seen in the past that preparation is more fruitful than scrambling in an emergency. We need the necessary protocols and procedures on detention, transfer and access for ICRC to be in place before operations start.

There are other active measures that the Council can take for the effective protection of civilians. The Council can scale up peacekeepers' presence where necessary, so as to effectively deter violence and adequately train, equip and resource peacekeepers so they can do their job; develop model operating procedures for mixed peacekeeping missions; ensure the highest standards of behaviour; and lastly, as stated in the Geneva Conventions, respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, at all times, including neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Maurer for his briefing this morning.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development of France.

In this special year for the United Nations, I wanted to invite representatives to take stock of the progress made in protecting civilians in peacekeeping operations. I welcome the Secretary-General, who has made such a big contribution to the progress achieved, and the President of the Central African Republic, whom I thank for having accepted my invitation and who has reminded us of what the United Nations has done for his country. Finally, I thank the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, who unfortunately could not join us, but who wanted to share with us his recommendations for ensuring better protection of civilians in armed conflict.

As we have just heard, a transformation of peacekeeping is under way. We all remember the failures of Srebrenica and Rwanda. We have taken note with concern of the latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2016/447), which indicates that international humanitarian law is increasingly being disregarded by parties to conflict. And it is always civilians that pay the price. However, the United Nations has taken stock of those challenges and has won decisive battles and saved thousands of lives. I am thinking, of course, of the Central African Republic, but also of Côte d'Ivoire where the United Nations has prevented mass atrocities from being committed. I am also thinking about northern Mali, where the United Nations protects the citizens and supports the implementation of a political solution.

To those who doubt the value of the United Nations, those successes show that it can successfully protect civilians, as long as three conditions are met. The first condition is that of setting an example. Violence committed by United Nations-mandated forces against populations must be combated with absolute firmness and in full respect of the rule of law. As troop-contributing countries, it is our duty to immediately refer to justice any substantiated allegation brought to our knowledge and to take the necessary protective measures, while respecting the presumption of innocence. It has to do with the dignity of the victims, as well as the honour of the United Nations and of all the military who fight tirelessly for peace.

The second condition is effectiveness. Effectiveness means setting a clear mandate for the protection of civilians, if need be by planning all the necessary measures for their defence. However, a clear mandate will be effective only if it is fully implemented by those — civilian and military — who should ensure that it is respected. We have seen progress in that areas as well, thanks to the regular dialogue between the Security Council and the troop-contributing countries, which has become the norm. Investment in favour of peace is also better distributed with the arrival of new countries. But we also need modern means — drones, intelligence, forecasting. While there has also been progress in that area, we must do more, especially for missions operating in a dangerous security environment. Let us together draw lessons from history. In the face of difficulties, withdrawal is not an option. Rather, we must ask ourselves how to strengthen and better ensure the security of our Blue Helmets.

In addition to military action, effectively protecting civilians implies an integrated policy. That means the deployment of legal experts and human rights experts; a visible United Nations presence on the ground, including in remote areas; cooperation with non-governmental organizations to develop an early-warning network; and partnership with judicial authorities so that the criminals arrested by Blue Helmets are brought to justice.

The third condition is the necessary political will of the countries concerned and of the international community to resolve the root causes of conflicts and to ensure inclusive and lasting political solutions. The violence in the Kivus will not cease as long as the armed groups responsible for it benefit from support in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in neighbouring countries. Crimes in South Sudan will continue if we do not put pressure on the belligerents. The Blue Helmets in the Sudan will not be able to assist civilians as long as the Government continues to obstruct their work.

In this collective effort, France has played, and will continue to play, its part. Our main commitment is to continue to tirelessly push for early action by the Security Council whenever there is a risk of mass atrocities. That is the whole meaning of our initiative with Mexico, but also with that of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, to which we have subscribed, on restricting the use of the veto whenever civilians face crimes that shock the universal conscience. When States no longer play their role, the United Nations has the responsibility to protect civilians, and it must fully assume that responsibility. We must therefore act collectively.

That is why we will continue to seek stronger action by the Security Council to end the horrific war waged by the Syrian regime against its own people. That is why we will continue to work for the deployment of a credible police presence in Burundi. All that is with one thing in mind: we must not repeat the mistakes of the past. As announced by the President of the French Republic from the podium of the General Assembly in September (see A/70/PV.13), the use of the veto must be suspended in cases of mass atrocities. It is our responsibility as a permanent member of the Council. More than half of Member States have already given their support to that initiative and, as far as we are concerned, we will implement it unilaterally. In February 2017 in Paris, a ministerial conference on the protection of children in armed conflict will be organized. Finally, violations of international humanitarian law in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, the Sudan and elsewhere must always be condemned. The fight against impunity is essential and must include unwavering support to the International Criminal Court so that the perpetrators of those crimes are held accountable.

Our second commitment is to defend a robust stance in peacekeeping in the service of people. The Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians are guidelines and provide a useful direction. France has decided to apply them, in compliance with its international obligations, including the Charter of the United Nations.

Our third commitment is to give the United Nations the means to achieve its ambitious objectives in the protection of civilians. France is one of the principal contributors to the budget of peacekeeping operations. With nearly 900 Blue Helmets deployed around the world, it is the second-largest troop contributor among the permanent members of the Security Council. In addition, several thousand French soldiers are deployed in a national capacity and provide daily support to peacekeeping operations. France, through me, is committed to maintaining its participation. It is our duty as a permanent member.

We also support the modernization of operations equipment, particularly in the area of intelligence. We encourage our partners to commit to peacekeeping operations. In that regard, I welcome the fact that, beyond the usual troop-contributing countries, Europe is back in full force, as is Canada.

We are committed to training 20,000 African soldiers a year. I wish to announce that, in Paris this autumn, we will organize a ministerial meeting on peacekeeping in francophone countries. Our goal is to secure concrete pledges for the provision and training of personnel serving in francophone countries. Training is fundamental before the deployment of troops. It is the best way to prevent conduct that is contrary to the noble mission of Blue Helmets.

Our fourth commitment is to work for zero tolerance in United Nations-mandated operations.

Whenever necessary, we must refer to justice systems allegations of violence committed by soldiers engaged in peacekeeping operations. We will apply that rule to our own forces, as we already do. Our soldiers also receive systematic training on respect for human rights and international humanitarian law prior to any deployment in the field.

Finally, we provide support to the Special Coordinator on Improving United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, through a financial contribution and the provision of a senior officer.

The example of the Central African Republic shows us how the United Nations can promote the prevention of mass atrocities when the Security Council stands united. We must pursue this path, while also strengthening the existing peacekeeping operations and making every effort to ensure that civilians are no longer by far the largest group of war victims throughout the world.

To denounce and to act; to denounce for acting — that is our collective responsibility so as to live up to the ideals that have inspired the Charter of the United Nations. That is what we owe to the soldiers who, on the ground and at peril to their lives, keep these ideals alive wherever tragedy forces them to intervene. The Council can count on France to fully assume its responsibilities.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to the other members of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and of Senegalese Abroad of the Republic of Senegal.

Mr. Ndiaye (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I want to congratulate you personally, Sir, and the French Republic on its presidency of the Council of the month of June and for organizing this extremely important debate.

France, we must stress, has always stood firmly by our side in the quest for and the construction and consolidation of peace in Africa. Without France, entire countries today would be in much more difficult situations. I am thinking in particular of Mali and the Central African Republic. In that connection, I welcome the presence here of the President of the Central African Republic, Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera.

I would like to say how pleased I am to take part today in this discussion, which focuses on the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations. That is a topic that is both important and very timely, and one that brings us together less than a month after the World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul. I would also like to thank and congratulate Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his important briefing, as well as Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for his own excellent briefing.

The holding of a ministerial meeting of the Security Council on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations gives us an opportunity to take stock of the actions undertaken in that area, and in particular to deepen our reflection on the challenges before the United Nations in general, and the Security Council in particular, in terms of implementing the mandates of peacekeeping operations.

We have all seen that, in various conflicts across the world, in particular in Africa, armed conflicts have always been characterized by the indiscriminate use of violence and the high number of civilian casualties, among which, unfortunately, the majority are children and women. The gloomy picture painted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/447) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, as well as the current humanitarian disasters around the world, remind us of a reality that bears repeating: the majority of the victims in armed conflict are civilians.

Allow me to express the great interest that Senegal attaches to the protection of civilians in the framework of peacekeeping operations. The commitment of my country to peacekeeping operations is intrinsically linked to the protection of civilians, and is further bolstered by the various international instruments on international humanitarian law, inter alia, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their multilateral protocols relating to human rights, not to mention the various African legal instruments, in particular the Organization of African Unity Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa of 1969.

Concern for the protection of civilians remains a major priority for Senegal in peacekeeping operations. I would like to recall that my country signed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians and, long ago, took a number of measures aimed at ensuring the protection of civilians. In that regard, the Senegalese armed forces, in particular contingents that are preparing for peacekeeping operations, have benefited from initial training and ongoing training in the legal aspects of conflicts with a view to better acquainting them with international humanitarian law and human rights issues in order to ensure better respect for the obligations that are incumbent on them.

In saying that, I would like to recall the courage demonstrated by Captain Mbaye Diagne of Senegal, who sacrificed his life to save civilians during the genocide in Rwanda. It is commendable that the Security Council, in resolution 2154 (2014), enshrined his memory in the glorious pages of its history by establishing, on 8 May 2014, the “aptain Mbaye Diagne Medal for Exceptional Bravery to honour military, police and civilian personnel of the United Nations and associated personnel who demonstrate exceptional courage in the service of humankind and the United Nations.

Furthermore, it is important to underscore the need to strengthen mobilization aimed at protecting civilians in armed conflicts. It is true that States have the primary responsibility to protect civilians, but it is also true that the United Nations, through the Security Council, has an essential role to play. To do that, it is important to strengthen the culture of preventing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, in all its forms, and to combat impunity for the perpetrators of such violations.

Senegal is firmly convinced that progress in peacekeeping operations in the protection of civilians needs to be measured against the way that the current threats to peace and international security have evolved. The new threats are terrorism and violent extremism, which require us to adapt radically so as to deal with them. In addition to peacekeeping and the maintenance of security, today's mission activities include various components, such as economic and humanitarian assistance, the protection of human rights, assistance to internally displaced persons and refugees, involvement in political processes, reforming justice systems, the training of police forces, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, demining, peacebuilding and much more.

The police component of peacekeeping operations, which was initially supposed to monitor, observe and report, is today called upon to play a more important role in the implementation of the new peacekeeping operation mandates established by the Security Council.

Current missions go beyond the strict security framework of peacekeeping operations and are being transformed into peacebuilding and protection-of-civilians missions, which requires enhanced synergy between the military, police and civilian components. We need to work more on that point.

At this stage, I would like to mention the reform of peacekeeping operations, which is necessary. We need to continue that process, even accelerate it, in order to better adapt peacekeeping operations to the most urgent present and future needs. The recommendations made by senior officials in their various reports, as well as those adopted by the General Assembly, include very ambitious measures, such as the modernization of troop equipment and increased financial support. The effective implementation of those measures should enable peacekeeping operations to enter a new phase in achieving their missions, thanks to an ongoing dialogue, inter alia on defining the contents of mandates and the roles to be played by the various stakeholders, including troop-contributing countries such as ours, donors and the United Nations.

Senegal is honoured to be the seventh largest troop- and police-contributing country in the world, the third in Africa and the first in West Africa, with approximately 3,769 men and women serving in seven peacekeeping operations. My country is also the first global contributor of police forces to peacekeeping operations. Our experience has shown that, in order to be effective, peacekeeping operations must not only be based on clear mandates, but also need to have the requisite financial resources and adequate equipment. In Mali, for example, we think, like other member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which met in Dakar on 4 June, that the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali needs to be more robust, with equipment that is adapted to the threats and murderous terrorist attacks directed against the troops almost daily, as well as with strengthened capacity in logistics and troops.

I would like to emphasize the importance of strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union and ECOWAS, in the framework of Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, which is devoted to regional agreements. That cooperation needs to be strengthened and intensified in order to provide greater support to regional economic communities. In the same vein, I would advocate for greater support by the international community to the African Peace and Security Architecture, so that

Africans can better manage the conflicts that take place in Africa.

The Security Council adopted resolutions 1265 (1999) and 1894 (2009), through which it established the protection of civilians as a top priority and expressed its determination to deal with situations in which serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights are committed. The Security Council must do more in the face of those challenges. In the same spirit, it is important to take into account resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, and the involvement of women in conflict prevention and the management and resolution of conflicts. It is also important to implement resolution 2282 (2016), on post-conflict peacebuilding, which the Council adopted on 27 April. One month earlier, on 11 March, the Council adopted resolution 2272 (2016), which aims to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation by peacekeeping mission staff. In that regard, it is important to note that His Excellency Mr. Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal, is a co-sponsor of the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict.

Senegal, as the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, has launched a reflection on two important topics, namely, the use of technology in peacekeeping operations and cooperation among the United Nations and regional organizations, in particular the African Union. In that context, we also plan to hold a thematic debate on the protection of civilians by focusing on the links between various political strategies.

Senegal is also thinking very seriously about the length of service of contingents, which sometimes puts men and women in pecaekeeping operations in situations that are very difficult to bear. We believe that contingents should be relieved more frequently.

In conclusion, I would like to once again express to you, Mr. President, and to France our warm congratulations and gratitude for the initiative of holding today's important ministerial debate. Through me, Senegal would like to reiterate its commitment to continuing to contribute to the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations around the world, with the hope that these operations have sufficient and appropriate resources and that their mandates are sufficiently clear and robust, as necessary, for them to perform tasks that have become increasingly complex and dangerous.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Minister Ayrault for being here with us to provide over today's debate. His presence is an affirmation of the importance that France attaches to protecting civilians, as evidenced in recent years by President Hollande's decision to send French forces to Mali and to the Central African Republic in the hour of their greatest need.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for his sustained efforts in pushing Member States and United Nations officials to protect the vulnerable. We are grateful to the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mr. Peter Maurer, for his briefing today and for the valiant efforts of the ICRC staff every single day to provide vital assistance to people in dire circumstances.

Let me last welcome President Touadera, whose inauguration I had the honour of attending and whose commitment to making a clean break from the past is a much-needed change in the Central African Republic, a country that knows too well the human consequences when civilians are attacked and when those who can help them stand by. I was most moved at President Touadera's inauguration by his decision to have on stage with him the 19 opponents who had run against him in the election. That was a very moving gesture of reconciliation and one I am not sure many of our countries would be able to muster in our politics.

Today's meeting comes a critically important time, as recent news has cast light both on the serious risks peacekeepers continue to take with so little fanfare to fulfil their mandates in some of the most dangerous parts of the world and, unfortunately, on the horrific consequences when peacekeepers violate the trust placed in them to protect innocent people in those same vulnerable circumstances. On 29 May, five Togolese peacekeepers serving in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali were killed and one was wounded when their convoy was ambushed by terrorists in Mali's Mopti region. Two days later, a Chinese peacekeeper was killed and others injured when the camp where they were stationed in Gao was attacked. And, as we all saw just yesterday, terrorists reportedly killed and wounded many Ethiopian troops in a massive coordinated attack on an African Union Mission in Somalia base in the town of Halgan, Somalia.

I would like to express sincere condolences on behalf of the American people and the United States

Government to the people of Togo, China and Ethiopia, and in particular to the families of the victims for their immeasurable loss. I would also like to convey our collective gratitude for their honourable service.

At the same time, we have seen other reports in recent days on the alleged extrajudicial execution of civilians in the Central African Republic by soldiers serving in the African Union-led peacekeeping mission in March 2014. The discoveries underscore the need for the Republic of the Congo, from where the peacekeepers alleged to have been involved in this incident have hailed, to ensure that the investigations and judicial proceedings under way are thorough and impartial, and to ensure that if any soldiers are found responsible they are held accountable. Again, we must treat these crimes as if they were crimes committed against our own people and act with equal vigilance and urgency. In this context, I would like to focus my remarks today on three ways the Security Council can help address chronic shortcomings when it comes to civilian protection in peacekeeping.

The first, reporting, should be easy. We strongly support the Secretary-General's demand in the report he released last month that "[a]ny failure by peacekeepers to act or follow orders will be brought to the attention of the Security Council" (*S/2016/447, para. 58*). However, we all know that such failures are rarely reported to the Council in a timely manner. More often, reports take many months to emerge if they emerge at all. To give just one example, a report by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services in 2014 found that, in 507 attacks against civilians from 2010 to 2013, peacekeepers virtually never used force to protect those coming under attack, likely resulting in the deaths of thousands of civilians. And yet those same investigators could not find a single case — not one — in which the failure of a peacekeeping unit to execute the order of a force commander was conveyed to the Security Council, or even included in the mission's situation reports that are regularly sent to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. This is not a functional system, nor is it a system acting in accordance with the will expressed by the Secretary-General or in appropriate response to the necessity for the Security Council to know what is happening in the field in missions that we have mandated and that we must take responsibility to try to strengthen. This situation must change, and we collectively have to be the ones to make it change.

Reporting is critical both for accountability and for bringing to the surface problems that have to be solved to make the collective enterprise more effective. Without reporting, impunity persists and bad practices become more common. Civilians are the ones who get hurt. When, on the other hand, a problem is reported to the Council, that is not a panacea, but we at least have a shot at using the bilateral and multilateral tools in our toolkit to address it.

Regular reporting can also help the Council right-size missions, taking into account the performance of peacekeepers on the ground, while allowing Council members' international capacity to offer targeted training and equipment to address the challenges the troop-contributing countries face. When appropriate, it also allows the Secretary-General to repatriate contingents that prove unwilling to protect civilians or that fail to investigate allegations of abuse or hold perpetrators accountable.

To cite just one example, of why reporting matters, take the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in the Sudan, where the Government of the Sudan continues to block vital equipment and supplies from reaching peacekeepers. As of Tuesday, 7 June, peacekeepers at Port Sudan only had 20 days worth of food remaining. Meanwhile, in southern Darfur, an entire battalion has been prevented from receiving personal weapons. Without such basic supplies, peacekeepers cannot even be expected to protect themselves, never mind to protect civilians who count on them. Yet word of the Sudanese Government's latest obstruction took longer than it should have to reach the Security Council. Now that these reports have reached us, the Council must do much more to demand that the Government of the Sudan comply with its obligations under the Status of Forces Agreement with the United Nations and that the Government respect UNAMID's freedom of movement.

The Council's inability to address this issue over the course of the past year is a shameful failure and a breach of our responsibility to the troops that we deploy who risk so much to advance peace in profoundly hostile environments. Some participants today were at the meeting of the troop- and police-contributing countries yesterday in which we heard first hand about what those troops are going through not being able to access food and basic supplies (see S/PV.7709). It is an embarrassment to the Council that we cannot make a collective demand on the Government to let that food reach those peacekeepers.

The second way the Council can improve protection of civilians is through improving the way it plans and adapts missions to conditions on the ground. Fulfilling our responsibility to protect civilians demands anticipating and preempting threats that analysis suggests are likely to emerge. This has to have not only at the planning stage for missions but also at regular intervals for as long as the mission is deployed, in order to respond kinetic and evolving circumstances in real time. This is basic common sense and yet as we all know it is far too rare.

Thirdly, and finally we must get better at matching the will and capacity of troop-contributing countries with mandates. Let us be honest: this was hard to do in the past, due to the scant supply of troops and police. But the nearly 50,000 additional troops and police pledged at last September's peacekeeping summit and in the days that followed were a game-changer, allowing us and the United Nations system to help ensure a better fit between what missions demand and what troops and police from a given country are willing and able to do. Troop- and police-contributing countries that have qualms about the mandates or that doubt their capacity to do what is asked of them should no longer deploy to missions simply because nobody else will. And neither the United Nations nor the Council should feel forced to leave in place Blue Helmets who are unwilling or unable to do what is asked of them.

Here I agree with the Minister that the Kigali Principles can be extremely helpful in aligning the will and capacity of contributors with the demands of respective missions. The Principles are designed to provide a concrete blueprint for shaping the practice of peacekeepers in volatile situations, particularly with respect to the theme of this meeting: the protection of civilians.

To give just one example, the Principles call for troop-contributing countries to empower the military commander of a peacekeeping contingent to make decisions on whether to use force to protect civilians, because experience has taught us that if a commander has to wait hours for guidance it may mean not being able to react in time to repel a fast-approaching attack on a nearby village. If properly implemented, the Principles can make peacekeeping missions more effective, improve security and save lives.

At present, 29 countries, including the United States, Senegal — as we heard — Uruguay and France, have announced support for the Kigali Principles, accounting for more than 40,000 troops and police currently serving in United Nations peacekeeping operations. That is over one third of the uniformed personnel on the ground right now. We encourage all troop-contributing countries to make these Principles their own, as we believe they are indispensable to effective peacekeeping in the twenty-first century.

Given the real-life implications of the Principles and what they suggest about a country's willingness to protect civilians under threat, we urge the United Nations to attach considerable weight to a country's commitment to implementing the Kigali Principles when it is selecting units for peacekeeping operations, particularly those operations deployed to volatile environments with civilian protection mandates.

In February of this year, armed men attacked a United Nations protection-of-civilians site in Malakal, South Sudan, where nearly 50,000 civilians were seeking protection and shelter from the country's civil conflict. At least 19 people were killed and more than 100 were wounded. Thousands more people who had been living in the camp fled and chose not to return, deciding that they felt safer outside the gates than under United Nations protection. The day after the attack, one resident told a reporter: "I saw the United Nations soldiers run away. What happens next time? I do not know. I saw many people die." Soon after the attack, the United Nations took the initiative to set up a board of inquiry, which will brief the Council on its findings in a few weeks, findings that will be useful not only for ensuring that there is accountability — if, indeed, peacekeepers fail to protect civilians — but also to learn what the Council can do to prevent the next Malakal.

While the horrors of that attack will leave an indelible mark on the victims and their families, actions like these could ensure that the more than 170,000 people who continue to live in camps under the protection of peacekeepers in South Sudan are more secure. Reporting that is regular, rigorous and transparent, planning that anticipates threats and is constantly adapting to evolving conditions on the ground, and deployments that ensure that the peacekeepers who serve in the most dangerous situations have the capacity and the will to protect civilians — these are steps that, if implemented, will not only make peacekeeping more effective, but will save countless lives.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine) (*spoke in French*): At the outset I wish to thank the French presidency of the Council for this timely initiative and the opportunity to have a fruitful discussion on such an important aspect of peacekeeping as the protection of civilians.

Ukraine, as an active troop-contributing country and a country where an armed conflict directed from outside is raging, views the issue of protection of civilians as the most important task of peacekeeping operations.

Civilians continue to constitute the vast majority of casualties in situations of armed conflict worldwide. Each day civilians are killed or wounded, often with absolute impunity. Sexual violence destroys the lives of women and girls and young men. Artillery shelling and air strikes destroy vital infrastructure and unleash massive displacement. Families are separated, entire communities are torn apart and generations of children grow up without enjoying the right to education. It is disturbing that nearly 60 million people worldwide have been forced to leave their homes because of conflict, violence and persecution. Among them are nearly 20 million refugees, over half of whom are under 18 years of age. Humanitarian needs are at record levels and more than 80 per cent of the United Nations humanitarian funding is directed at conflict response. The fate of civilians in conflict remains extremely worrying, and much more needs to be done for their protection.

According to the outcomes of the three most recent comprehensive reviews of peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture and the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), the United Nations nowadays has to play a proactive role to prevent the outbreak, resurgence or continuing of armed conflict. Therefore, preventive diplomacy represents an important but underused tool that the Council should deploy more actively to ensure that peace is maintained. This tool should be brought in as soon as possible when a conflict is emerging. For instance, we see the need to expand the Council's highly positive experience in the framework of visiting missions this year in Africa to all parts of the world where situations warrant the Council's involvement on the ground.

(*spoke in English*)

While Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the European Union delegation, I would like to make a few remarks in my national capacity. As a non-permanent member of the Council, Ukraine knows at first hand that sometimes the Security Council cannot react promptly to threats to a civilian population because the absence of a host country's consent stands in the way of the rapid deployment of a peacekeeping mission. However, it is hard to explain the Council's inaction in response to a direct request to host a United Nations mission, whose presence on the ground would provide additional protection to civilians and contribute to stopping the violence.

Our calls for Council action on such a request from Ukraine — where the civilian population continues to suffer from foreign military aggression — were not heeded. Russian-led illegal armed groups, with direct support of the Russian regular military forces, continue to wage war in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, with dire consequences for civilians residing there. According to reports on the situation in Ukraine by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), civilians have paid the greatest price for this conflict. Since 2014, OHCHR recorded more than 9,000 people killed and more than 21,000 injured in the conflict area in eastern Ukraine. Up to 2,000 civilians have been killed in armed hostilities, mostly as a result of the indiscriminate shelling of populated areas from various artillery systems.

In a situation where the Council finds itself blocked from discharging its direct responsibilities, Ukraine is compelled to use other possibilities at the regional level to establish an international armed presence in the occupied territories in order to protect civilians and ensure full implementation of the Minsk Agreements. I would like to use this forum to call on the occupying Power to implement the respective provisions of the Minsk Agreements.

Just a few weeks ago, we marked the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all of the Blue Helmets who are risking their lives to bring peace and stability to people in different parts of the world. Since its inception, United Nations peace operations have proved to be an adaptive instrument and flagship activity of our Organization.

The protection of civilians has become an obvious objective for United Nations peacekeeping operations, and the success of a peacekeeping mission is often judged by its ability to protect civilians. Ukraine is a State contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations, has recognized the Kigali Principles and again committed itself to the policy that the protection of civilians is an overarching goal of United Nations peacekeeping.

We strongly believe that the peacekeeping operations authorized by the Security Council have to be provided with robust mandates for civilian protection. Any uniformed personnel who witnesses violence against civilians should not hesitate to do everything possible to stop it is. We should the view that the United Nations should build and enhance its strategic partnership with regional organizations and work alongside them, sharing its unique experience in peacekeeping activities. We welcome the close cooperation and partnership of the United Nations with the European Union and the African Union.

As we can clearly see from the Council's interaction last month with the African Union (see S/PV.7694), these regional organizations have their own vision and approach to the issues of regional peace and security. The African Union has also become one of the key partners of the United Nations in conducting peace operations on the African continent. We share the view that the common purpose between the United Nations and the African Union should be established throughout the whole process of peacekeeping activity, with protection of civilians as an integral part of these efforts. We see potential in establishing closer interaction between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In that regard, we would welcome United Nations initiatives aimed at contributing to the peace activities of the OSCE on the ground, especially when regional organizations' missions are displayed in an insecure environment.

It is a generally recognized approach that those responsible for war crimes, violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights are to be held accountable. Therefore, a peace achieved by parties to a conflict should not in any way mean impunity for perpetrators of atrocities against the civilian population. All victims of crime deserve justice and nothing less.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay.

Mr. Cancela (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like at the outset to thank the French presidency for having organized this very timely debate, and I hope that this meeting will provide elements that will make it possible to renew the commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and strengthen the instruments available to peace operations to carry out this task.

I will focus on the specific aim of this debate, but first I should like to point out that the task of protecting civilians through United Nations peacekeeping operations represents the top of a pyramid whose base must include efforts to address the structural causes of conflict and to strengthen the institutions and tools necessary to achieve a sustainable peace.

In any case, no political, economic or other type of consideration should supersede the human dimension of international action. It is a legal and ethical imperative to protect vulnerable people and those who are most exposed to violence, exploitation, discrimination and the deprivation of their rights. This imperative underpins the responsibility of the United Nations to do everything in its power to protect civilians. That is why the protection of civilians must be the cornerstone of the mandates and resources allocated to peace operations. This is also crucial for the legitimacy and credibility of the entire United Nations system.

In this connection, Uruguay deems it crucial that we be capable of assessing the current state of this contribution and work to adapt the capabilities of the United Nations peacekeeping system to new challenges.

First, it is crucial to understand that protecting civilians is a multidimensional task that includes many players and that does not mean only the use of force as a response to the imminent danger of violence. The protection of civilians is much more than rules of engagement.

In that respect, we believe that it is crucial that we strengthen non-armed strategies, which have a great potential. From our experience on the ground, we can conclude that the ability of peacekeepers to carry out protection tasks depends largely on their ability to gain the trust of the local population. The creation of confidence-building mechanisms is crucial in order to comply with the mandate to protect civilians, because it makes it possible to involve the local population in the work of the mission and provides access to larger information networks, which, in many cases, makes it possible to prevent crimes from being committed against civilians.

Likewise, I would point out the importance of forging communication networks with local populations through various early-warning mechanisms. By way of example, I would point out the early-warning network established by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through the distribution of cell phones to members of the local population, thus fostering direct contact in a context where there are few means of communication.

The development of a climate of tolerance and understanding through recreational activities, including mixed activities, among communities in conflict, such as the Uruguayan contingent has promoted in the town of Pinga, in North Kivu, can help to improve the relationship between troops and civil society, which leads to positive results in terms of establishing an environment conducive to peace.

It is undeniable that beyond these experiences of cooperation, early warning and direct links, as I mentioned earlier, there are extreme situations that require physical protection measures for which the troops that are deployed must be mentally prepared and appropriately equipped and trained. As was pointed out in the Ramos-Horta report in relation to the basic principles of peacekeeping operations, although they were still valid they should in no case be used as an excuse to not protect civilians.

In this respect, we reaffirm Uruguay's full commitment to the protection of civilians through peacekeeping operations. That is why our country has adhered to the Kigali Principles, reaffirmed the importance of strengthening pre-deployment training, and encourages the consideration and implementation of the recommendations emanating from the Ramos-Horta report, such as the establishment of sequential mandates. We also support resolution 2272 (2016). United Nations personnel at the very minimum must not undermine the trust placed in them by the civilian population, nor should they exploit the vulnerability of those whom they are supposed to be protecting.

We reject the impunity that continues to be enjoyed by the perpetrators of deplorable acts of violence and remain convinced of the importance of the Security Council strengthening its cooperation with the International Criminal Court.

In this connection, we believe that we should assess the role of peacekeeping operations in this framework, for example, when it comes to collecting evidence. We highlight the importance of developing a record of victims of mass attacks, both to help in attributing responsibility and also to prevent future atrocities.

In 2008, the General Assembly was able to reach consensus on the use of the term "protection of civilians" as applied to peacekeeping missions. Today, eight years later, much progress has been made, but we are aware that the road ahead is long and fraught with difficulties. Let us therefore walk it together, like a mother in the Democratic Republic of the Congo who recently walked more than five hours through the jungle to give away one pineapple to our contingent at the Kimua base to save the life of her son.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain.

Mr. Ybáñez (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I want first to thank France, through Foreign Minister Ayrault, for organizing this open debate that is also the first after the publication of the annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2016/447). The report confirms once again that civilians are the main victims of armed conflict in the twenty-first century.

The recent World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul has allowed us to affirm the importance of complying with international humanitarian law. Conduct in hostilities is subject to a number of rules that cannot and should not be violated with impunity. I refer to the use of explosives in densely populated areas, barrel bombs and cluster munitions, among others.

Spain is particularly concerned about the growing trend of direct attacks on doctors and hospitals. The recent adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) — sponsored by Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay — has allowed us to further address this issue in the Security Council, but it is only a first step. Reversing this trend will require a coordinated effort of the Council, the Assembly and the Secretariat, in coordination with specialized organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières.

Ensuring humanitarian access has become, unfortunately, the new task to be addressed in various theaters of conflict, most notably in Syria, where hundreds of thousands of civilians are trapped in besieged or inaccessible areas. International humanitarian law is very clear that parties to conflict have a responsibility to ensure safe, free and ongoing access to the civilian population. Their failure to do so may constitute a war crime.

Before turning to the peacekeeping operations, the main subject of this open debate, I wish to refer to the protection of journalists in armed conflict. We are currently witnessing a growing threat to freedom of expression, which plays a key role in conflict prevention and the denunciation of war crimes. Spain therefore supports the creation of a post of special representative for this matter.

As the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) notes, when a peacekeeping operation is deployed with a mandate to protect civilians, it must do everything in its power to protect threatened civilians, and non-military strategies should be at the forefront of that effort. Peace operations should be conceived as political instruments, and the best way they can protect civilians is to help to end conflicts by supporting peace processes, promoting trust between the parties, reporting to ensure accountability, and generally using their political influence.

People are the victims of conflicts and must be at the heart of our task in the search for peace. This requires recognizing the centrality of political solutions and ultimately prioritizing prevention and mediation to the utmost as essential tools in finding such solutions, without which there can be no peacekeeping in our time. This is particularly clear in the case of protection of civilians mandates, because without progress in the political settlement of conflicts it is very difficult for a mission to effectively ensure the necessary protection to civilians, as the reality on the ground shows in too many instances.

Of course, recognizing the centrality of political solutions does not mean that we can avoid paying urgent attention to the operational aspects of the protection of civilians. I will return to this point, but I want to emphasize that my country welcomes the general direction of our efforts in the context of the review of peace operations, including in such crucial as the protection of civilians. Not surprisingly, mediation and conflict prevention are two of the priorities of Spain's foreign policy, as is the protection of civilians. We are sincerely convinced that the review of peace operations is therefore heading in the correct direction.

Conflict prevention is closely linked to women and peace and security agenda, to which Spain is also particularly committed. My country led the review of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, and is now working to put it into practice. Last October, the Security Council held an open debate (S/PV.7533) with a record number of speakers, at which it unanimously adopted resolution 2242 (2015). The big challenge now is to move from rhetoric to fulfilling our commitments in deed. Spain continues to work in that direction. Among other measures, alongside the United Kingdom it has headed the creation of an informal group of experts of the Security Council on women, peace and security, which we want to become a key tool for integrating gender issues into the discussions of the Council on the situation the countries on its agenda.

Naturally, the women and peace and security agenda is not relevant solely to the protection of civilians, given its aspects related to conflict prevention. Unfortunately, women and children are the primary victims in conflict, and as such are the first in line in need of protection. In that sense, I would stress the importance of deploying protection of women advisers in all United Nations missions. The same is true of child protection advisers. Protection mandates should also continue to enjoy support at the highest level to fulfil their essential task of ensuring effective and consistent protection.

Spain also wishes to support the proposal, made by Foreign Minister Ayrault in his statement, to strengthen protection of civilians mandates, focusing on combating human trafficking.

(*spoke in French*)

As a Francophile, if not Francophone country, we also welcome the organization by France of a ministerial meeting on peacekeeping in Franchophone countries, to be held in Paris in the autumn.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

As I mentioned earlier, recognizing the centrality of political solutions does not mean that we can avoid paying urgent attention to the operational aspects of the protection of civilians. We must redouble our efforts to improve the planning and capabilities of peace operations.

First, if we want the operations to be effective in the protection of civilians, it is essential to improve their design, with clear mandates on the content of such protection. If we wish to create mandates that are clear, phased and properly adapted to the reality on the ground we must also improve information. In this sense, Spain supports the development of the new United Nations intelligence policy framework.

Secondly, as noted in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, we must close the gap between means and ends that is found often in the mandates of operations — a gap that has especially severe consequences in the case of the protection of civilians. It is imperative to equip our Blue Helmets with the assets and capabilities necessary to fulfil the missions we assign them, as well as with clear rules of engagement, and to make efficient use of the possibilities offered by new technologies.

Thirdly, we must redouble our efforts in training, both general and specific, on the implementation of mandates and force generation, and ensure that we have the best possible mission leadership.

Fourthly, we must ensure that there is effective dialogue among the Security Council, the troop-contributing countries and the Secretariat. We should also be able to have better information by developing strategic communication from the earliest stages of a mission's establishment and right through its conclusion.

I cannot fail to mention the absolute need to eradicate sexual abuse and exploitation. It is intolerable for those responsible for ensuring the protection of civilians to also be the same who assault them in the most humiliating way. We must move from a zero-tolerance policy to a reality where this scourge no longer exists.

Finally, I recall that sovereignty not only gives a State the right to control its own affairs, but also confers the primary responsibility to protect the population within its borders. We cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of thousands of the world's citizens. In the face of their pain, inaction is not an option. Peacekeeping operations with a mandate to protect civilians are the best tool we have to strengthen the necessary implementation of the responsibility to protect. I refer specifically to its second pillar, that is, providing States with the crucial assistance they need to meet their primary responsibility for protecting their populations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Mr. Hamachi (Japan): Japan highly appreciates the French initiative to afford us this opportunity to discuss this topic frankly at an open debate of the Security Council. My appreciation also goes out to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Mr. Peter Maurer and Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera for their insightful briefings.

The protection of civilians is now one of the most important mandates given to United Nations peacekeeping operations. However, there is a persistent gap between the mandates conferred by the Security Council and their implementation in the field. Japan commends the various efforts by the United Nations to address that issue. They include the development of guidelines and training programmes aimed at enhancing the implementation of mandates on the ground by promoting a common understanding on concrete actions in the field.

The protection of civilians should be undertaken by the entire mission, including not only military but also police and civilian personnel. On the one hand, physical protection with the use of force is necessary when the need for protection is most imminent. On the other hand, preventive efforts against attacks on civilians are equally important. In addition, improving access to humanitarian aid and creating safe environments for refugees and internally displaced persons are also important components of the protection of civilians. For example, Japan's engineering unit deployed in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan contributes to the implementation of its mandate through engineering activities, such as setting up protection-of-civilians sites and undertaking road maintenance and repair.

Japan shares the recognition that capacity-building for personnel is essential for the effective implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandate. To that end, Japan has provided financial support to the United Nations training-the-trainers course on the protection of civilians, in which Japanese trainers also participate. Furthermore, Japan assists in the development of training materials for women's protection advisers in missions, who play a critical role in protecting women. Finally, Japan also supports the development of an e-learning programme on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse that targets all categories of field personnel, including military, police and civilian.

I would like to recall that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with the host country. In addition, harassment against civilians by the host country is unacceptable. Against that backdrop, it is crucial to clarify and promote understanding among local communities of what the United Nations can and cannot do. With a view to achieving the future departure of a United Nations peacekeeping operation, it is imperative to foster ownership on the part of the host country and to support its capacity-building. In that regard, institution-building, including security-sector reform, is essential. An open debate will be held next month under the Japanese presidency on the topic of peacebuilding in Africa, with a particular focus on institution-building. We hope to carry over the results of today's fruitful debate to our open debate in July.

The international community is watching closely to see whether peacekeeping operations can effectively implement the protection of civilians, as well as what the Security Council can do in that regard. I would like to conclude my remarks by promising the Security Council that Japan will continue to apply its expertise and capacities to contribute to the protection of civilians, both here in the Council and on the ground.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates the initiative of France to hold today's open debate on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations. We welcome Foreign Minister Ayrault's presence in New York to preside over the meeting. We also welcome His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic. We also thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. And we listened attentively to the briefing by Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali suffered terrorist bomb attacks on 31 May, in which the young Chinese peacekeeper Sheng Liangliang unfortunately lost his life. He had devoted his precious life to the cause of peace. His body returned to his home country yesterday, where he will forever rest in the soil of his fatherland.

Nevertheless, China's commitment to the peacekeeping cause is unflinching, and our support for United Nations peacekeeping operations will remain unswerving. United Nations peacekeeping operations are an important means of safeguarding world peace, security and stability. The Security Council adopted resolution 1265 (1999) in 1999, while more recently it has adopted many other resolutions and presidential statements on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, thereby establishing a legal framework for protecting civilians in armed conflict. Protecting civilians has also become a mandate conferred on United Nations peacekeeping operations. China supports the Council's discussing the topic of protecting civilians in peacekeeping operations. We would like to highlight several points.

First, peacekeeping operations, when implementing the mandate of protecting civilians, should, on the premise of respecting the ownership of host countries, clarify their perimeters, conditions and limits; maintain objectivity and neutrality; ensure the recognition and support of the host countries and the international community; and form useful complementarity with the operations of host countries. Peacekeeping operations cannot replace the responsibilities and duties of host country Governments or parties to the conflict to protect civilians, and they should try to avoid becoming a party to the conflict.

Secondly, when formulating the mandate to protect civilians, the Council should comprehensively take into account the prevailing circumstances and specific needs of host countries,as well as the conditions and capacities of the peacekeeping missions, and ensure that related mandates are specific, clear, realistic and viable. The Council should assess the implementation of the mandates by the mission in a dynamic manner and make timely adjustments in accordance with the changing circumstances. The international community should strengthen the capacity-building of the troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and ensure that peacekeeping missions acquire the equipment and resources needed for completing their mandate.

Thirdly, advancing the political settlement of hotspot issues is the fundamental way to attain the goal of protecting civilians. The international community should strengthen the sense of urgency and the political settlement of regional hotspot issues, and ensure sustained protection for civilians in conflict areas. Peacekeeping operations should fully use their own advantages to actively promote the peaceful settlement of disputes, work with the related efforts of the international community to seek political settlement of hotspot issues, and create conditions and an environment conducive to advancing the process of political settlement of the hotspot issues.

Fourthly, protecting civilians requires emphasis to be placed on the role of the African Union and other regional organizations. Nearly 60 per cent of peacekeeping operations are deployed on the African continent. The African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States and other regional and subregional organizations know best the realities of Africa and can therefore come up with responsive recommendations designed to protect civilians. Peacekeeping operations should pay attention to strengthening communication with the African Union and other regional and subregional organizations, fully use the role of these organizations and, with respect to the protection of civilians, listen carefully to their opinions and recommendations so as to support the resolution of African problems in an African manner.

Fifthly, it is essential to prioritize addressing sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. Peacekeepers are devoted to the noble cause of maintaining international peace and security, yet in the course of doing so a handful have been implicated in sexual exploitation and abuse in some countries, seriously damaging the reputation and contravening the purposes of peacekeeping operations. The Council, the Secretariat, TCCs and host countries should strengthen their cooperation, resolutely implement a zero-tolerance policy, firmly punish acts of sexual exploitation and abuse by permiiting no impunity, bring perpetrators to account, restore justice to the victims and uphold the image and reputation of peacekeeping operations.

Mr. Taula (New Zealand): We wish to start by acknowledging France's contribution on the front line of efforts to protect civilians in Mali, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire and elsewhere. We also thank the President of the Central African Republic and we particularly welcome the remarks about his Government's commitment to national reconciliation. New Zealand has learned from our own experience how important this is to long-term stability.

Twenty-two years ago this week, the Council adopted its first explicit protection of civilians mandate in resolution 925 (1994) relating to Rwanda. Tragically, in spite of this resolution, nothing significant was done to stop the subsequent genocide. We have come a long way since that historic failure, and today United Nations peacekeepers play a decisive role in protecting civilians, saving many thousands of lives and delivering many more from the threat of violence. Their work is difficult, and many peacekeepers have paid the ultimate price. We pay tribute to their commitment and their sacrifice. Today I wish to focus on four areas where New Zealand believes action is needed to improve United Nations performance.

First, protection mandates need to be clear, realistic and part of a coherent political strategy. We need to avoid exposing our peacekeepers to unacceptable levels of risk, or setting expectations that they cannot fill. New Zealand echoes the call by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations for more sequencing and prioritization of mandates. These need to be grounded in clear strategies for addressing the factors that make civilians vulnerable in the first place. Political solutions will always deliver more for protection of civilians than boots on the ground will.

If we are honest, we have not seen Council practice improve much since these recommendations were made. Mandating remains a relatively pro forma exercise, often without much consultation or policy deliberation on the key implementation challenges. Recent adjustments to the mandate of the United Nations Mission in the South Sudan were a more positive experience in terms of prioritization and phasing, but we would like to see more of this.

Secondly, we need to build better understanding among all stakeholders of how protection mandates should be carried out. Progress has been made in developing protection strategies, clear doctrine and operating procedures, but coordination is still lacking across political, humanitarian, military, human rights and development actors. The experience in South Sudan has highlighted many serious challenges, including cooperation with humanitarian actors, questions of mission authority and host-State relations.

We believe that protection of civilians sites should never be a strategy of first choice. They should be employed only in extreme circumstances, as we saw in South Sudan, or when the mission is genuinely unable to provide more proactive protection further afield. New Zealand has pushed for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to report on lessons learned from the protection of civilians sites in South Sudan and we look forward to acting on the findings from the report.

Meaningful consultations with stakeholders are also essential for making sure mandates are fit-for-purpose and effectively implemented. Engagement with troop and police contributors is critical. It is unreasonable to expect countries to take on the difficult and dangerous job of protecting civilians while excluding them from key discussions. New Zealand has been working over the past year to improve the quality of Council engagement with contributing countries and the Secretariat. Through the informal, off-the-record format, these triangular consultations give Council members a deeper understanding of the realities on the ground, and they help contributing countries to better understand the Council's approach. We believe that over time they will mean better mandates and more effective implementation. New Zealand has facilitated these consultations with four missions so far and we are working with Council colleagues and contributing countries to make them an established and consistent feature of the Council.

Thirdly, decision-makers at all levels need to receive better, more timely and reliable information on emerging threats and protection needs. This requires close engagement with local populations and an understanding of why and how civilians are being targeted. It requires relevant information to be systematically gathered, collated, analysed and provided to those who need it, whether that be area-level commanders or the Council itself. To ensure that key challenges and risks to civilians are understood and effectively managed, the Council requires better, unfiltered reporting. The Secretariat should be more open regarding the difficult policy and operational choices facing missions.

Mechanisms, such as the one New Zealand helped establish last year for the Council to monitor the operational risks and protection challenges faced by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, can help in this regard, but they need to be expanded. We hope that we can move forward on practical steps to ensure the Council is regularly informed of key risks to civilians and United Nations personnel across all missions. This is an essential complement to the Council's existing tools for situational awareness.

Finally, protection mandates must be backed by the necessary political will to enable them to succeed. For the Council and the General Assembly, this means providing missions with the resources and political support to carry out their mandates. For contributing countries, it means ensuring deployed personnel have a clear understanding of their mandated tasks and are trained, equipped and empowered to implement them effectively. It also means being restrained and transparent in imposing caveats and respecting the United Nations chain of command and mission leadership. The protection of civilians would also benefit enormously from a more systematic approach to reviewing implementation at the mission level. The Council needs to know in what areas and by whom protection mandates are being implemented effectively and where they need to be improved.

During our remaining time on the Council, New Zealand wants to achieve practical progress in these areas. If we succeed, we will be more likely to generate the political will needed to protect civilians in crises. Let us make sure we do.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to commend you, Mr. President, for a very rich French presidency of the Security Council this month and for the choice of the theme of this morning's debate. I would also like to congratulate and welcome President Faustin Touadera, who has honoured us with his presence today and with the living example of a country that gives us hope for the possibility of emerging from crises, thanks to the President's clear-sighted leadership of the Central African Republic at the present time.

(*spoke in English*)

Would like also to thank the Secretary-General for his opening remarks and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, who spoke to us from Geneva, for his insightful and comprehensive briefing to the Council.

There is wide agreement on the postulate that prevention is the most effective way to address potential conflict situations; that States bear the primary responsibility for the protection of its civilian populations and that the international community plays a subsidiary, but very important, role in addressing these serious issues. The latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2016/447) outlines how civilians account for the vast majority of casualties in today's armed conflicts, which are characterized by high levels of brutality and a disregard for human life and dignity. Civilians are killed, severely injured, maimed, tortured, taken hostage and disappeared. They are abducted, forcibly recruited into armed groups, displaced from their homes, separated from their families and denied access to the most basic necessities in targeted and indiscriminate acts. Sexual and gender-based violence is widespread in schools, while direct attacks on schools and hospitals have become commonplace.

Humanitarian needs have reached a peak with over 60 million people displaced, owing to conflicts, and over 80 per cent of United Nations humanitarian funding directed to respond to conflicts, and humanitarian access remains a key challenge, limited or restricted as it is in many complex situations. Humanitarian and health-care workers are deliberately targeted and international humanitarian law is permanently violated against a backdrop of prevailing impunity. For these reasons, we fully share the Secretary-General's view that ensuring accountability should be a priority since most parties in today's armed conflicts consistently disregard their obligations under international humanitarian law by deliberately targeting and brutalizing civilians and attacking civilian infrastructure, while widespread impunity deprives victims of any kind of justice.

The report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) underlines the protection of civilians in armed conflict as a core principal of international humanitarian law and a moral responsibility of the United Nations. We acknowledge that the crucial role of peacekeeping operations in the protection of civilians is an important element of the global commitment to prevent and resolve conflicts.

Angola welcomes the commitment of the Secretary-General to involve the United Nations and the Security Council in particular in situations of escalating risks to civilians. In countries where United Nations peacekeeping operations are deployed, the missions' capacities to fulfil their mandates must be ensured, especially the protection of civilians. In fact, we are of the view that the credibility of a given peacekeeping mission depends on its capability and resolve to act when civilians are under threat.

The High-level Panel calls for sustained, predictable and flexible funding mechanisms in support of peacekeeping operations. Since most peacekeeping operations are deployed on the African continent, we join the Panel in recommending the strengthening of the United Nations-African Union partnership in order to guarantee a more effective protection of civilians, particularly in African Union-led peacekeeping operations. The case of the Central African Republic clearly illustrates the importance of this and the example and the testimony presented to the Council by President Touadera is quite clear on this.

That is why Angola welcomes the adoption, in 2015, of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians as a tool to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the protection of civilians mandates and enhanced accountability. Timely coordination between missions and humanitarian actors is crucial in pursuing enhanced strategies, as those partners often work closely with the communities, especially internally displaced persons.

Engagement with the local communities in the promotion and protection of civilians is also vital. Community alert networks and community liaison assistants are of crucial importance in understanding perceptions of threats at the community level with a view to reducing risks and understanding how they should be addressed by peacekeeping operations. We welcome the deployment of senior advisers on the protection of civilians in all missions, with an advisory role on the development of strategies and in coordinating protection of civilian mandates. Another measure that has demontrated great effectiveness is the deployment training of peacekeeping personnel on the protection of civilians, in particular children and women, and on conflict-related sexual violence, in accordance with United Nations standards, mandates and the rules of engagement.

We reiterate the key importance of ensuring political solutions to conflicts by non-coercive means. We recall that preventive diplomacy remains the most effective way of reducing the risk of armed conflict and protecting civilians.

Finally, we highlight the critical importance of improving the accountability, transparency and performance of United Nations peace operations. The proper conduct and discipline of personnel are crucial to their credibility and effectiveness. The United Nations should continue to advocate the political and peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with the Charter, at the core of the international effort to prevent and resolve conflicts and protect civilians.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we welcome the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, which reflects the importance that his country attaches to this subject. We also welcome His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, and thank him for his statement. It is an honour to have him and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, here today.

Venezuela aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In many contemporary armed conflicts, civilian populations have become the main victims of the conflict situations that impact different parts of the planet, where the loss of lives and the suffering of civilians far exceed those of the combatants. Punitive military action is taken deliberately against civilians, who have become military targets. That tragic reality is evident in the conflicts that are rocking the Middle East and Africa, where women, children and the elderly have become targets of attacks perpetrated by the actors involved in those bloody wars, particularly terrorist groups, in violation of international humanitarian law. In that respect, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, the Sudan, South Sudan and Palestine, among others, are scenarios in which the civilian population has suffered the ravages of indiscriminate violence.

The recourse to violence and terrorism to undermine societies, civilizations, religions and beliefs is assuming terrible manifestations, such as the recruitment of children, abductions, the destruction of the cultural heritage of humankind, slavery and sexual violence as weapons of war, as well as the use of chemical weapons. Nevertheless, at the very heart of all this is the terrible tragedy that has impacted the civilian population as a result of practices in response to intolerance, violent extremism and sectarianism. Those actions paint a very clear picture of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, the perpetrators of which must be brought to justice.

Those armed conflicts have caused the displacement of civilian populations fleeing war to protect their lives. By late 2015, more than 60 million people hade been displaced by conflict, violence and persecution. The number of persons internally displaced by conflict and violence increased by more than 2.8 million people in 2015, and reached an unprecedented total of 40.8 million. In addition, the number of refugees has exceeded 20 million for the first time in 20 years.

Despite the gravity of those challenges, we wish to highlight the important review processes undertaken by the Organization in 2015. All of those processes underscored the need to prevent crises instead of responding to them once they occur, which exacts great human and financial costs, and to work beyond institutional divisions to address complex problems. Those messages are crucial to strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

Civilians who find themselves in the midst of armed conflict require protection. United Nations peacekeeping operations should play a more active and central role in that regard. They must always conduct themselves impartially, in defence of their own security and their mandate, and with the consent of the host State. In that context, non-armed strategies should be at the forefront of United Nations efforts in the protection of civilians. Peacekeeping operations, as inherently political instruments, can protect civilians more effectively by helping to build trust among the parties, ending conflicts and facilitating peace agreements. The quest for a political solution must guide the design, deployment and withdrawal of United Nations peacekeeping operations on the ground.

Humanitarian organizations, such as the Red Cross, play a crucial role to that end. The success of non-armed United Nations strategies for the protection of civilians depends to a certain degree on their ability to forge strong alliances among those players and to work closely with local communities. The United Nations must make due use of those important resources, highlighting the capabilities and practices of local communities and humanitarian organizations on the ground in order to create an environment that is conducive to the protection of civilians. In that respect, it is very important to guarantee humanitarian access so that civilians can receive the assistance and protection necessary to their survival. In that regard, we condemn the siege practices used by actors involved in armed conflicts that prevent the delivery of food and medicine for civilians in humanitarian need.

However, in situations where the civilian population finds itself under imminent threat of attack, peacekeeping troops must always be ready to act assertively. To that end, forces should always have the equipment and training necessary to successfully deal with those situations. At the same time, we reaffirm emphatically that the protection of civilians cannot in any circumstances be used as an excuse to undermine the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of States.

Taking into account the provisions of international humanitarian law and the need to protect civilians in the midst of such bloody conflicts as those in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, we cannot fail to stress the my Government's focus on the situation of violence that continues in the Palestinian territories as a result of the Israeli illegal occupation, and that affects in particular the human rights of Palestinians, who are the victims of the repressive policies of the occupying Power, whose actions inflict indescribable human suffering and represent a protection crisis for the Palestinian people.

Given this very clear picture of systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, the international community must raise its voice in defence of the Palestinian people and take the measures necessary to guarantee their human rights. We therefore reiterate our appeal for a response to the request made by the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, for the establishment of a system of international protection for the Palestinian population in the occupied territories, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention and resolution 904 (1994). That is one instance of concrete action that the Council could take to protect civilians.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to warmly thank France for organizing this very important ministerial debate on the protection of civilian populations during peacekeeping operations. I also wish to welcome your presence here with us today, Mr. Minister, and that of His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic. I also thank Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for his statement.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The atrocities that civilians endure in the many conflicts raging around the world today, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, represent an unprecedented challenge to the basic pillars of international law, international humanitarian law and the enforcement of the principle of protecting civilians in times of conflict. Such atrocities particularly impact women and children, the groups most vulnerable to such violations. Despite the great advancements on the conceptual level in the protection of civilians since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), which established the protection of civilians as a key priority for the Security Council and made it one of the major pillars of the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations, the continued plight of civilians in many armed conflicts has clearly exemplified the degree of failure of our efforts to provide protection on the ground. The most appropriate way for peacekeeping operations to undertake a role in protecting civilians is still unclear. There is no agreement yet among Member States on the effectiveness of the use of force by United Nations missions to protect civilians. In that context, Egypt pays tribute to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians in armed conflict.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was granted an active mandate in the field of cooperation, in particular with the Force Intervention Brigade, which was an offensive component. Despite its relative success, that mandate did not succeed in providing enough protection to civilians in eastern Congo, where they are still the victims of atrocities at the hands of armed groups. Turning to South Sudan, the Organization provided direct protection to civilians in the United Nations camps. However, despite those efforts, that style of direct protection — notwithstanding its moral imperative — is still extremely costly and not sustainable. It also does not expand its protection to the hundreds of thousands of civilians at risk beyond the gates of United Nations camps. In addition, they face overcrowding in such camps, particularly the ones that impose security inside those walls.

We should first stress that States and Governments shoulder the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians. The objective of peacekeeping operations is to promote the capabilities of States to meet their obligations, while respecting the principles of sovereignty, national ownership and the cultural specificity of the host country. In that context, we can look at the role of peacekeeping operations in providing protection to civilians in terms of three main pillars.

First, as a political tool that enables them to play a central role in providing a conducive environment to end conflicts and reach a peaceful settlement and in providing support to the parties to the conflict in the implementation of the peace agreements reached among them.

Secondly, those missions play a role in providing physical and material protection to civilians through the military and police forces in cases where the State is unable to provide protection and the peacekeepers establish refugee camps or counter the attacks of armed groups.

Thirdly, the missions can provide a safe environment through the implementation of a number of measures, including promoting and developing relevant national institutions in the country concerned, such as the justice and security sectors.

Therefore, efforts to develop the capabilities of peacekeeping operations must stress the following:

First, operations should standardize the concepts regarding the protection of civilians and set policies that accurately define the duties demanded of the peacekeeping operations, including clarifying the rules of engagement that the forces must adhere to while undertaking their duties.

Secondly, troop-contributing countries should be involved in establishing the mandates of the peacekeeping operations and a planning process aimed at ensuring the presence of a common vision and common objective with regard to the tasks that the operations should carry out.

Thirdly, troop-contributing countries must include a component on the protection of civilians in their predeployment training so that they can inform their troops of the scope of their duties.

Fourthly, the Secretariat should be encouraged to initiate better communication on the social level, have an early-warning system, report any attack against civilians and ensure a prompt response from the peacekeeping operations.

Fifthly, peacekeeping missions should be provided with the necessary expertise and components so as to enable them to provide protection to civilians, and the Secretariat must regularly provide a report on all United Nations missions on the extent to which they have implemented their mandate.

Indeed, there have been great advancements in the capability of peacekeeping operations to provide protection to civilians. However, the increasing number of conflicts and gross violations, including the resort to violence, forced displacements and cutting access to humanitarian aid, are factors that we need to take into account in order to promote a better role for the United Nations in the framework of peacekeeping operations, in particular with regard tor the protection of civilians. Here I would like to refer to the fact that ending conflicts is the only sure way to sustainably protect civilians. The effective protection of civilians in armed conflict should not be limited to physical or material protection. It should focus, first and foremost, on providing political solutions aimed at ending conflicts and preventing their resurgence. It should also address the root causes of such conflicts so as to prevent their recurrence.

That might be the central message emanating from the reports of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/682) and of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture (S/2015/490), in addition to the need to accord greater attention in the future to the new challenges and difficulties that threaten civilians, which, apart from armed conflicts, consist mainly of the spread of international terrorism as a nefarious phenomenon. Any effort to promote only material or physical protection will end up being only a marginal effort that tackles the symptoms and not the source of the problem. It will not ensure a genuine and sustainable protection of civilians. Peacekeeping operations are merely a tool to protect civilians and should therefore be used in the framework of a more comprehensive strategy aimed at settling conflicts and preventing their resurgence.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are happy to welcome you, Mr. Minister, presiding as the President of the Security Council. We would like to thank the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their briefings. The statement of the President of the Central African Republic is particularly important for the Security Council in the context of our discussion on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The theme of the protection of civilians is extremely important for the Security Council. This is the third time this year that we are having a general discussion on that topic. In the meantime, the number of problems in that area is not diminishing, while recently the attention of the United Nations and the international community has been drawn to new worrisome phenomena.

The need for the protection of civilians is a most direct and important consequence of conflicts. We are convinced that in order to remedy the unfavourable situation with regard to the protection of civilians, it is important to move away from selective and unilateral approaches and focus on violations of international humanitarian law. We need strict compliance with human rights standards and the full implementation of the relevant Security Council decisions by all parties to armed conflicts. However, the political resolution of conflicts is the only effective way to eliminate threats to civilians. Its promotion is the most important function of the Security Council.

The primary responsibility for ensuring the protection of civilians lies with the parties to a conflict. At the same time, in the difficult conditions of an acute crisis, the host country is not always able to carry out those functions.

In that connection, most of the peacekeeping missions endorsed by the Security Council have a mandate to protect civilians, to assist national efforts. That is one of the key aspects of peacekeeping operations. We believe that the actions of peacekeepers should be holistic and involve close cooperation among the military, police and civilian components, in coordination with national authorities, local communities and relevant humanitarian organizations.

When speaking of the protection of civilians by United Nations Blue Helmets, we have to underscore the main principles of peacekeeping: the consent of parties, impartiality and the non-use of force except in self-defence or in implementing the mandate approved by the Security Council. These conditions, unfortunately, have recently been considered by some countries as almost a hindrance to carrying out the missions of their mandates. And yet we think that these principles are what guarantees the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations.

In today's conditions, when we have mostly internal conflicts, civilians are in particularly vulnerable situations, associated with sides in a conflict. In some cases, it is difficult to separate them from the combatants. In this context, it is particularly important to establish contacts with the sides and to make clear the impartiality of peacekeepers. At the same time, host States must not only take the primary responsibility in protecting their populations; they must also provide all necessary support for peacekeeping missions deployed in their territory. There is no doubt that the protection of civilians should be a priority, but no less a priority should be the security of peacekeepers.

We think it is very important, in developing the mandates of peacekeeping missions, that Council members realize how dangerous it is to link the task of protecting civilians with conducting offensive counter-terrorist operations. These specific tasks can be dealt with only by specially trained and equipped national security forces. We welcome to the corresponding conclusions in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446), which was supported by the members of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.

United Nations peacekeepers, in carrying out their duties, deservedly enjoy the respect and trust of the civilian population. That is why their actions and behaviours should be exemplary in every way. It is essential to take all measures to prevent any kind of violation, including sexual abuse. Resolution 2272 (2016), on sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations, clearly states that measures to prevent and combat that phenomenon apply to all missions deployed with the endorsement of the Security Council.

Incidents of serious law-breaking and acts of violence by foreign contingents, including those of a sexual nature, are identified with increasing frequency. Troop-contributing countries have full responsibility for punishing their peacekeepers. Disciplinary action is not enough when it comes to criminal violations. We also think that when national peacekeeping contingents operating under the mandate of the Security Council commit sexual exploitation or abuse, it is unacceptable to release them from responsibility. If we are speaking of a zero-tolerance policy on this issue, the standards for combating such violations should be the same for everyone.

I have one further comment. In his statement, the representative of Ukraine rebuked the Security Council for supposedly not reacting to its initiative seeking the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation in his country. I wish to note for the record that the Security Council never received such a proposal. Obviously, the Council is not obligated to react to periodic public statements by Ukrainian officials that are mainly publicity stunts and are aimed at diverting attention from Kyiv's non-compliance with the Minsk agreements.

Ukraine should stop its daily shelling of civilian targets in Donbass, which has led to the destruction of vital infrastructure and the death of civilians. Also, Ukraine should enact laws on the special status of Donbass and on amnesty. It should establish a dialogue with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk, as provided for in the Minsk agreements. That will be the best form of peacekeeping.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I join earlier speakers in welcoming Foreign Minister Ayrault to the presidency of theSecurity Council. I also thank the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their respective briefings. On this note, I greatly appreciate and value the participation of His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, and thank him for for his briefing, which my delegation followed with much interest. His presence here today signifies to us the commitment of the Government and people of the Central African Republic to moving forward and leaving behind the troubling days of the past. The presence of so many high-level dignitaries among us today clearly manifests the importance of the topic of our discussions. We thank the French presidency for bringing it into sharper focus by organizing today's debate.

In aligning ourselves with the statements to be delivered later by the representatives of Thailand and Iran, who will speak on behalf the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement, respectively, and with a view to engaging on the question posed in the concept note (S/2016/503, annex), I wish to highlight the following points.

The Secretary-General's latest report on the protection of civilians (S/2016/447) underscores the grim reality that, overwhelmingly, civilians and non-combatants continue to bear the brunt of armed conflict at all stages. The numbers are staggering and horrifying. In 2015 alone, hundreds of thousands perished during conflict and even while fleeing it. The survivors, after enduring perilous journeys, have ended up living in appalling conditions where the majority eke out a miserable existence as refugees and displaced persons in desperate need of food, shelter and medicine. Others who are unlucky face death and the destruction of their villages and homes. The horrors of conflict became even more gruesome when women and girls became targets of terror groups like Da'esh and Boko Haram and were sold into sexual slavery or were used as objects for recruitment or ransom.

In many instances, we have followed the stories with a sense of helplessness, strengthening our resolve that the perpetrators must be held accountable. We have been briefed on how emboldened the perpetrators are, continuously committing heinous crimes with a sense of impunity. In today's world, we are no longer remotely detached from the battlefields and conflict zones. Our conscience bleeds at the savagery and brutality inflicted on the innocent trapped in conflict zones.

Humankind has seen so many killing fields. We must do more to stop this carnage. Where we can make difference, we should make a difference. In conflict zones where we conduct United Nations peace operations, we must ensure that the hopes that we bring to the people are not dashed. We need to invest greater efforts to translate civilian-protection norms and standards into actions that ultimately save lives.

The lessons learned in Bosnia, Rwanda and elsewhere on the role of the United Nations, particularly with respect to the efficacy of peacekeeping operations, have been instructive in spurring our collective efforts to prioritize the protection of civilians. The Security Council has since sought to address the gaps and challenges exposed during the handling of those tragic situations by the United Nations. A paradigm shift occurred with the introduction of multidimensional mandates, a core component of which is civilian protections.

In addition to prioritizing protection for the most vulnerable segments in conflict situations, we established clear normative standards prohibiting harm directed against humanitarian personnel, including medical and health-care personnel and even journalists. The call for protections also extends to civilian infrastructure, especially schools and hospitals. The civilian-protection agenda has also benefited from further mainstreaming during the course of the three-year review exercises last year, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and at the recently concluded World Humanitarian Summit.

In the light of these recent positive developments and the far-reaching commitments made by States, it would seem that the civilian-protection agenda is firmly entrenched and fully implemented. Unfortunately, much more needs to be done by States.

There are key issues that we must collectively address and on which the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446) and the Secretary-General's implementation report (S/2015/682) have provided relevant commentary and recommendations Among them are the tensions inherent in the first principles of the United Nations peacekeeping and protection-of-civilian imperatives. In this context, we are of the view that the Council should remain open to reviewing mandates if or when a situation warrants it. Furthermore, given that United Nations peace operations today are deployed in increasingly complex and challenging environments, sometimes in theatres where there is hardly any peace to keep, mandates should be realistic and implementable.

While closer triangular cooperation and coordination are central, particularly during the mandate design phase, similar emphasis should be placed on engaging with the host States, including on status of mission and status of forces arrangements, with a view to ensuring the smooth deployment of troops and assets. In that context, we welcome the proactive steps taken by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to conclude so-called compacts with host States, including the Central African Republic, that seek to enhance understanding on those arrangements so as to facilitate their full and effective implementation.

While we believe that troop-contributing countries (TCCs) in any given peace operation maintain their sovereign rights, including on prescribing caveats regarding their troops and personnel, we are of the view that to the extent possible, such caveats should accommodate civilian protection mandates. We therefore encourage and support DPKO's ongoing efforts to engage and sensitize TCCs on the need to minimize or rescind caveats, particularly those that may impair the protection of civilians mandate.

In terms of prevention, the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative is a concrete example of the operationalization of the conflict prevention imperative. That and other relevant recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations should enjoy our full support to ensure that United Nations peacekeeping remains relevant and effective.

Effective partnerships are equally crucial if United Nations peace operations are to effectively implement the protection of civilians mandate. As mentioned earlier, while cooperation at all stages is key, at the same time collaboration and cooperation with the United Nations system and other actors on the ground are equally important. Additionally, cooperation with regional organizations, particularly the African Union, on the early mobilization of a peacekeeping presence could be further explored. The possibility of inter-mission cooperation should also be left open.

I wish to stress that we have seen the alarming plight of innocent civilians in conflict zones and why we need to do more to help them. We have seen too many deaths and the numbers presented to us represent our fellow human beings — human faces that we must not ignore. They include those suffering from sexual abuse. The only way to conclude is to reaffirm our commitment and resolve to help those who beg us to intervene and save their lives.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): Let me begin by welcoming President Touadera to the Council and thanking him and Mr. Maurer for their briefings. I also want to thank the Secretary-General for his remarks and for his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2016/447).

My conclusion from this debate so far, sadly, is that the protection of civilians in conflict is in crisis. Whether in Syria or in South Sudan, we are failing the most vulnerable when they need us the most — when they are being targeted in their homes, when they are being targeted in hospitals and even when they are being targeted by the very peacekeepers sent to protect them. The United Nations invented peacekeeping in order to prevent war, so civilians benefit hugely when peacekeeping works. But too often, peacekeeping is failing to live up to the high standards that victims rightly require.

Yesterday I met with Nadia Murad — the Yazidi woman whom I mentioned in my statement last week (see S/PV.7704). She told me, very movingly, how 19 girls were burned alive this week in her community. That is the barbarity that civilians now face. It is almost unspeakable. And yet she told me that she still has hope because she feels that justice is on her side. Our job today is to show people like Nadia that there is cause for hope — that we can and will protect civilians. I see four steps that we need to take.

First, we need to prepare peacekeepers for this seemingly impossible task. How can we best train, equip and deploy them? How can we ensure that they make a real difference to the communities that they are sent to protect? To answer those questions, we need to recognize that as threats to civilians change, so peacekeeping must change too. This means that all of us must look into the future so that we can better understand operating environments and the threats that civilians and peacekeepers face. New technology and better intelligence can help, but to maximize impact and sustainability personnel need to be trained and equipped to use those new tools.

President Obama's summit on peacekeeping last September successfully increased the quantity of peacekeepers available to the United Nations. We now need to improve the overall quality. The United Nations needs a mechanism to choose only those troops who can definitively protect civilians effectively, and to replace those who are unable or unwilling to fulfil their mandated tasks. In that way, we can create a new generation of peacekeeping — one with the protection of civilians at its heart.

Secondly, the tragedies of Syria, South Sudan and Yemen show that there needs to be better compliance with international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General's report makes clear that strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law is a prerequisite for improving the protection of civilians. Those laws are binding on all sides of any conflict. They strike a balance between military necessity and basic humanity. When those laws are breached, everyone loses.

The primary responsibility for complying with those laws lies with the parties to conflict, as the Secretary-General and, indeed, my Russian colleague reminded us today. When they starve and besiege, when they attack schools and hospitals, or when they impeded humanitarian access, we see unimagineable suffering, populations fleeing, economies collapsing, a whole country left staring into the abyss.

We recognized at the World Humanitarian Summit that the humanitarian system needs reform. I am pleased that the Summit included a renewed commitment to international humanitarian law. However — and this is my third point — to deter future breaches of international humanitarian law, we need greater accountability for when there is no compliance, or when the protection of civilians is ignored or violated. The Secretary-General talks of a pervasive lack of accountability. That must be tackled. States must investigate crimes that occur in their jurisdiction. When they cannot or will not, international mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court have an important role to play.

Accountability is crucial to improving the protection of civilians in peacekeeping. Enhanced reporting mechanisms are needed, including independent mission observers. Commanders must monitor for violations and missions should work closely with local communities and non-governmental organizations. They all must be able to report their findings independently and regularly to us. There is no greater need for accountability than for those sexually exploited and abused by peacekeepers — those who have been betrayed by the people sent to protect them. Through resolution 2272 (2016), we pledged to tackle the scourge, but to make progress we need a commitment from the entire international community to making zero tolerance a reality.

My final point is that the protection of civilians is not confined to those under attack. It extends to those who risk everything to flee across land and sea to find refuge. So we welcome the Secretary-General's report on large movements of refugees and migrants (A/70/59) and the planning under way for the high-level events of the General Assembly. Together we need to deliver a framework for better global management of migration, one that places greater emphasis on global responsibility-sharing to provide real protection for refugees. I hope that we can build on the London-Syria conference commitments and the compact of ideas, and find comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

Let me close by stressing that the United Kingdom is committed to playing our part to enhance the protection of civilians. It is why we have deployed personnel to United Nations peacekeeping missions in Somalia and South Sudan in recent weeks, and it is why we are hosting a peacekeeping defence ministerial meeting in September. Because through those commitments, and more — everything else that we are doing — I believe that we can help Nadia and all civilians under threat, across the world, so that they too can have hope; so that they too can believe that justice is on their side.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to issue a reminder about our work. Statements should last for no more than four minutes, so that we can conclude today's discussion in a timely manner. Delegations that wish to make longer statements are asked to make the full statement available in writing and make a shorter statement here in the Council. Delegations are also requested to speak at a normal speed for purposes of interpretation.

I wish also to inform all concerned that we will continue with this open debate right through the lunch hour, given the very large number of speakers.

I give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate of Sweden.

Ms. Lövin (Sweden): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway — and my own country, Sweden. These remarks are in addition to the statement that will be delivered by the observer of the European Union later today, with which we align ourselves.

To begin with, let me thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this important open debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Peter Maurer and President Touadera for their contributions this morning and the Council for its efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

As outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/447), the protection of civilians is at the core of our common purpose. The heroic efforts of United Nations personnel and the commitment of troop- and police-contributing countries are a testament to this. They deserve our deepest respect, recognizing that their mission may also entail sacrifice.

Let me highlight three ideas that we believe should underpin the protection-of-civilians agenda of the twenty-first century.

First, peacekeepers and peace operations must be properly resourced to protect. Governments have the primary responsibility to protect civilians. But while we recommit to enhancing national efforts, United Nations peace operations must be able to assist in fulfilling this responsibility. All peacekeepers need to be properly prepared, trained and equipped.

We must therefore ensure that all United Nations personnel, at all levels and in all functions, receive adequate training on the protection of civilians, child protection and preventing conflict-related sexual violence before deployment, and that continual training is provided in the field.

The Nordic countries commit significant resources to capacity-building, across the board, from military to civilian personnel, from local authorities to civil society, and States to regional organizations. We do so in a wide variety of contexts, ranging from the coalition against Da'esh, to support for the Eastern African Standby Force.

In addition, Sweden is supporting the development of pre-deployment training standards for United Nations corrections officers. Over the last 11 years, the Swedish prison and probation service has provided pre-deployment training to more than 400 corrections officers from all over the world.

Secondly, prevention contributes to protection.

By increasing our efforts in the field of prevention and peacebuilding, and addressing the root causes of conflict, we foster sustainable peace. Important joint steps towards this have been taken through the recent resolutions on the United Nations peacebuilding architecture. We believe that a shift towards prevention, underpinned by local perspectives, should be seen as an antidote to atrocities.

Needless to say, the protection of civilians includes the protection of women and children, in particular girls. Furthermore, women and girls need to be considered as powerful agents for prevention and protection. We therefore need to ensure women's and girls' influence and meaningful participation. One tool in support of United Nations mediation activities is our Nordic Women Mediators' Network.

Our experiences in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) have taught us that the efficient protection of civilians requires close cooperation among military, police and civilian components within the United Nations system, as well as successful coordination with local authorities, humanitarian organizations and civil society. MINUSMA has also demonstrated the importance of strengthened situational awareness to the effective protection of civilians as well as peacekeepers. We welcome the development of a policy framework for intelligence in support of United Nations peace operations.

Seeking national and regional perspectives is key, and enhanced and more dynamic partnerships are critical, including with regional and subregional organizations. More predictable, sustainable and long-term financing is also essential in this regard. The Nordic countries provide long-term financing for peace and development in a wide variety of ways, including through significant non-earmarked contributions to different parts of the United Nations system.

Thirdly, and lastly, we need norms that safeguard humanity. Humanitarian organizations and humanitarian and medical personnel play a crucial role in the protection of civilians, both through active efforts and through their very presence. They must be respected and given swift and unimpeded access to those in need. Their facilities and transports must be protected, and they must never be targeted, harmed or prevented from saving lives in contravention of international law.

The very purpose of international humanitarian law is to protect civilians in armed conflict. These norms, which safeguard humankind, must be upheld. We therefore commend the Council for its adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), which strongly condemns acts of violence, attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, medical and humanitarian personnel and hospitals and medical facilities. We also need to increase our humanitarian efforts to respond effectively to crises. The first-ever World Humanitarian Summit, held in May, provides an excellent point of departure for our intensified efforts and the way forward. The Nordic countries have long been among the top financial and political supporters of the humanitarian agenda. We intend to maintain our high level of support.

Let me conclude by honouring the legacy of an individual who I believe embodied the courage that defines the proud mission carried out by United Nations peacekeepers all over the world, every day: the late Captain Mbaye Diagne, who saved hundreds of lives, perhaps as many as 1,000. His heroic deeds illustrate the fact that the protection of civilians is within the scope of our common action. Because the protection of civilians needs to be pursued in partnership, we need to listen to the voices of the vulnerable, we need to ensure the dignity of the defenceless, and we need to keep civilians safe — together.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence of Nepal.

Mr. Rawal (Nepal): On behalf of the Government of Nepal, I wish to compliment the French presidency of the Security Council this month for holding this debate on the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations. As a consistent and major troop and police contributor for nearly six decades, my country attaches particular significance to this debate.

In the interest of time, I will deliver an abridged version of my statement; the full version will be available in PaperSmart.

While the safety and security of civilians is primarily the responsibility of national Governments, it is also critical to the legitimacy and credibility of United Nations peacekeeping missions, since civilians account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts, often as soft targets.

There is now a greater need for a fine balance between the realities of the field, the principles of peacekeeping and the responsibility of protecting civilians.

Nepali peacekeepers are fully oriented towards protecting civilians, particularly women and girls, during and after conflict. The Nepal Army, Nepal Police and the Armed Police Force Nepal have all integrated United Nations policies regarding the protection of civilians, sexual exploitation and abuse, and protection of human rights into the predeployment training of peacekeepers. Together, we have already started placing investigation officers in every contingent to investigate disciplinary issues, gender-based violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse. In this connection, it is my pleasure to reiterate that Nepal supports the Kigali principles.

Nepal applauds the increasing triangular cooperation between the Security Council, the Secretariat and troop- and police-contributing countries as a key to accomplishing civilian protection mandates. We encourage further reinvigorated synergy between these partners, with all due efforts to ensure that peacekeeping operations are not politicized. The provision of additional resources should be considered a prerequisite — initially, at least at the force-headquarters level — for missions with civilian protection mandates.

Nepali peacekeepers have always believed in building the best possible rapport with the civilian population through community services and other confidence-building measures. Based on our positive experience, the practice may be worth emulating. The safety and security of peacekeepers themselves should be built into mission mandates and the rules of engagement to complement the purpose of civilian protection.

I wish to highlight two practical pitfalls that, in our experience, should always be considered while crafting civilian protection mandates. The first is how to guard against unrealistic expectations that peacekeepers will be able to protect all civilians at all times. This issue comes to the fore particularly as expectations invariably rise following each successful act of civilian protection. The second pitfall is how far to go for protection and what level to escalate to. There is a very fine line where well-meaning but mismanaged intervention for civilian protection suddenly results in United Nations peacekeepers being perceived as no longer neutral.

The principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations constitute a fundamental plank of Nepal's foreign policy. The Constitution that Nepal adopted last September by over four-fifths majority — by far its most forward-looking, inclusive and democratic ever — both inspires and provides for a national commitment to the cause of international peace, security and prosperity.

Since 1958, Nepal has consistently contributed peacekeepers for the maintenance of international peace and security under the aegis of the United Nations. While Nepali peacekeepers are currently deployed in 15 out of 16 missions, over 122,000 peacekeepers have already completed tours of duty in 42 different missions. Nepal does not hesitate to partake in the most challenging of missions, often in response to urgent requests and never, I might add, with national caveats. With 72 Nepali peacekeepers having made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty, my delegation cannot but feel honoured to join forces with you, Mr. President, and all our partners as we march ahead in this noble endeavour.

I wish to conclude by expressing our gratitude to all peacekeepers deployed in United Nations peacekeeping missions, and by paying tribute to those who have sacrificed their lives for the noble cause of maintaining international peace and security around the world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, African Integration and International Cooperation of Chad,

Mr. Mahamat (Chad) (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank you, Sir, for having organized this important open debate on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations and for inviting me to participate in this discussion. I also thank the Secretary-General; His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic; and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Armed conflicts currently raging throughout the world reveal the suffering of civilians, particularly women, children and the vulnerable. Despite the obligations arising under the Geneva Conventions and the various relevant resolutions of the Security Council on the protection of civilians, the gap between the responsibilities outlined in those texts and realities on the ground remains wide as civilians remain the deliberate targets of violence and brutal attacks in all theatres of war.

Since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) 17 years ago, the United Nations has engaged in massive efforts to strengthen its role in the protection of civilians, as evidenced by the resolutions and presidential statements adopted thereafter to that end. Nonetheless, recent crises around the world unfortunately demonstrate that the strengthening of the normative framework for protecting civilians does not often translate into specific action on the ground. United Nations peacekeeping operations, as their name indicates, are primarily called on to help build peace and security. However, we note that for over a decade now, these missions have been deployed where there has been no peace to keep, insecurity reigns and civilians are increasingly exposed to violence.

Protecting civilians in such an environment requires a more proactive commitment, ranging from the mere presence of Blue Helmets to their involvement in prevention, mobility and active intervention with the option, in extreme cases, to use force to physically protect civilians from imminent danger. In Mali, for instance, the extremely difficult environment and the asymmetric threat not only complicate the mission to protect civilians, but expose the Blue Helmets to daily attacks by improvised explosive device, claiming numerous casualties among them. Seventy-one Chadian soldiers have lost their lives in Mali. How can peacekeepers who cannot even protect themselves fulfil their mission to protect civilians? We must find a solution to this paradoxical solution by providing the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali with all the means necessary, including not only an appropriate mandate but rules of engagement that are fully commensurate with the situation on the ground.

Despite the efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, violence against civilians in those countries sometimes descends to unimaginable depths. The entire world has borne witness to the atrocities carried out in full impunity against civilians in the Central African Republic and South Sudan, not to mention the horrendous massacres carried out by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, the scope and cruelty of which have transcended all bounds in the city of Damasak.

The presence of peacekeeping operations in some of those countries has certainly helped prevent the worst, but it has not prevented all violence against civilians, who must sometimes band together to defending themselves. In the face of the massacres committed by Boko Haram and the terrorist threat, the armed forces of the members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission have begun protecting millions of civilians, even without a United Nations mandate. Even as I speak here, some 2,000 Chadian soldiers have crossed our national border to assist the Nigerian army in protecting thousands of civilian victims of Boko Haram's barbarity. Moreover, Chad — surrounded by crises in every direction and host to 750,000 refugees — has for a number of years sacrificed and continues to sacrifice in order to protect those refugees by deploying an integrated security unit, whose work has been commended by the entire international community.

With or without peacekeeping operations, the protection of civilians must be an absolute priority everywhere and at all times. Efforts to that end must be supported by the international community as a whole. Given the increasingly complex environments and the asymmetrical threats faced by peacekeeping missions, the Security Council ought to consider the limitations of classical operations and carry out an ongoing review of its peacekeeping to adapt them to the specific changing scenarios and by a better integration of the protection of civilians in its dimensions.

While bearing in mind the primary responsibility of the parties to the conflict to protect civilians, we should also emphasize the importance of the contributions of regional and subregional organizations, local actors and non-governmental organizations in strengthening protection for civilians. In that regard, the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations in protecting civilians also includes developing closer interaction and coordination of protection activities among those stakeholders, in particular regional and subregional organizations, which have a comparative advantage with regard to proximity to a situation, knowledge of the terrain and ease of communication with local populations. As part of their interaction, we should also highlight the need for missions to demonstrate independence and impartiality, so as to safeguard their credibility in all instances. In that connection, the United Nations should avoid that the concept of the protection of civilians serve as a pretext for justifying regime change, military intervention or any other action contrary to the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

The effectiveness of protection-of-civilians mandates also requires an exemplary partnership among the Security Council, the Secretariat and the troop- and police-contributing countries in order to arrive at a common understanding of the challenges faced in providing protection. Moreover, we must ensure that the Blue Helmets who are deployed possess, among other things, a high degree of ability, adequate training and suitable equipment and a mastery of the language of the host country, without which they will not be able to effectively carry out their mandate to protect civilians. Likewise, it is important to draw lessons learned and best practices from mission experience in order to identify areas where there are shortcomings to overcome that may lend themselves to improvement. Also, effectively prosecuting the perpetrators of violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law will serve as an element of deterrence for parties to a conflict. Such an undertaking should not exempt Blue Helmets who may be guilty of the same types of violations.

Effectively ensuring the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations also involves taking into account various elements of a mission's mandate. Mission mandates must therefore be systematically be adapted to the changing circumstances, while there is also a need for the necessary political and logistical support and strong commitment on the part of troop- and police-contributing countries on the ground. Also of importance are the issues of training and accountability, synergy of effort and the sharing of information among all the relevant parties, including local and regional actors.

In conclusion, we hope that today's debate marks a new phase in the commitment of the States Members of the United Nations to fully assume their responsibilities on the protection of civilians and to reiterate their resolute determination no longer to tolerate unjustified attacks against civilians under any pretext.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada.

Mr. Dion (Canada) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank France, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, as well as you personally, Sir, for affording me this opportunity to address the Council on the subject of the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping operations. This initiative by France is necessary given the alarming the situation of civilians in situations of armed conflict. It has been a little more than 15 years since the Council first did pioneering work in placing the protection of civilians as a central element of its mandate. Nevertheless, the situation of civilians in armed conflicts has only deteriorated since.

Here in the Council in 2015 (see S/PV.7374), the Secretary-General told of a terrible toll. Humanitarian organizations reported that the number of people in urgent need of assistance and protection increased from 52 million to 76 million in 2014 alone. That is a huge increase. There is therefore urgency in finding solutions and ensuring that the Council does more pioneering work to concretely implement the principles and existing declarations on the protection of civilians.

It is for that reason that Canada announced at the General Assembly in May its adherence to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which reflects the explicit determination of Africans to protect civilians. Today I wish to announce our support for two important initiatives that directly target the need for swift and decisive action by the Council in the event of massive human rights violations. First, Canada joins the political declaration, submitted by France and Mexico, on suspending the use of the veto in the Security Council in the event of mass atrocities. Secondly, Canada endorses the code of conduct put forward by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group with regard to measures against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In its letter of invitation to this meeting, France submitted to us four main issues on the protection of civilians. In fact, this is about no fewer than four fundamental responsibilities with regard to which we must respond.

Our first responsibility is to properly assess the implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates in peace operations. We must build on what has already been done. The adoption by the United Nations more rigorous mechanisms on performance and accountability is therefore a step in the right direction. The same goes for the commitment of the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council failures in protecting civilians. Those are measures that contribute to the aim of the United Nations, among other things, to combat the scourge of sexual exploitation and violence.

Our second responsibility is to ensure that Blue Helmets fully understand their obligations to protect civilians. Too often the instructions are ambiguous. The protection-of-civilians mandates drafted by the Council should clear. Depending on the experience of peacekeepers in protecting civilians, the Council should clarify the mandates so that they are understandable and reflect the complexity of missions. Such a complete understanding of mandates by peacekeepers is necessary in all aspects of a missions, namely, the use of innovative strategies to protect civilians, meeting the need for all the resources required on the ground, evaluating and classifying the threats facing civilians, responding quickly when communities are threatened and taking into account the special needs of the most vulnerable groups, such as displaced persons, refugees, women and children.

Our third responsibility is to promote the deepening of cooperation between the United Nations and regional and international organizations, such as the African Union, to promote awareness of the need to protect of civilians. To that end, we should compile lessons learned from our experience in Mali and the Central African Republic so as to ensure that the African Union receives better support in protecting civilians.

(*spoke in English*)

Our fourth responsibility is to ensure that the protection of civilians forms an integral part of the training peacekeepers receive before their deployment in the field. Each country that contributes troops and police forces has an individual and essential responsibility. More developed States must provide assistance to less-developed ones by funding peacekeeping training centres.

Those are the improvements we need to make to ensure that United Nations peacekeeping missions can better protect civilians. We must adhere to the Kigali Principles. We must support the policy initiative launched by France and Mexico on the suspension of the veto in the Security Council in cases of mass atrocities. We must endorse the code of conduct put forward by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group.

We must take on the four responsibilities raised by France, that is, a fair assessment of the implementation of mandates, a complete understanding by peacekeepers of their mandates, better cooperation between the United Nations and regional and international organizations and, ultimately, protecting civilians as an integral part of the training of peacekeepers.Those are four improvements needed so that our peacekeepers can endure as guardians of civilians. Without political will, however, those improvements will have little effect.

Consider Syria in recent weeks. Flagrant violations of international law, including attacks against medical facilities and their staff, as well as the blocking of humanitarian aid to besieged communities. Canada reiterates its full support for the measures taken by the Security Council to end such violations. Many of us seek peace in that region. Canada is doing its part in the coalition to help Syria and Iraq by responding to humanitarian appeals and supporting United Nations efforts to strengthen emergency measures to protect civilians, in particular the most vulnerable populations, and reduce food insecurity.

But Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and our Government want to do more. Canada is back, including in peacekeeping missions. We have committed to increasing our support for United Nations peacekeeping operations and support its mediation efforts in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. Those commitments reflect our deep desire to be a determined peacebuilder and to make a real and valuable contribution to building a more peaceful and prosperous world. Canada believes that, if followed by concrete and resolute action and inspired by responsible conviction, the French initiative, which brings us together today, can ensure that our peacekeeping missions will always protect civilians. Let us unite so that those civilians who need our protection may one day be less numerous.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency, Mr. Ibrahim Yacoubou, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, African Integration and Nigeriens abroad.

Mr. Yacoubou (Niger) (*spoke in French*) I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council on behalf of your country for the month of June 2016. I also wish to welcome, once again, the presence of the President of the Central African Republic at this important meeting. I would also like to congratulate you, Sir, for organizing this debate, a particularly important one for our Organization and for States such as mine, the Niger.

Indeed, as you know, the Niger is a country resolutely committed to peacekeeping operations through our significant contribution of civilian, military and police components. To date, we have more than 1,820 men and women serving in those operations, making our country, the Niger, the 17th global contributor in that regard. The Niger has firmly adhered to the principles of Kigali, which we consider to be relevant and appropriate. With regard to the specific topic of our meeting today, namely, the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations, we believe that it is essential to make a few observations.

The first is that the nature of conflict has evolved considerably to the point that most conflicts are not inter-State wars involving regular armies in which the men and women involved are conventional soldiers known and recognized as part of a regular army and identifiable by their uniform or their units. Instead, conventional armies are pitted against terrorist groups that operate outside of laws and conventions, recruit civilians to arms and make no distinction among those they target.

Our challenge as democratic States is therefore two-fold in seeking to protect civilians. First, we must ensure that we do not victimize innocent civilians in our armed conflicts; secondly, we must ensure that all civilian populations affected by such conflicts are protected and preserved in dignity as human beings. Even if they are refugees, displaced persons or returnees, civilian populations have the right to protection. That must remain a priority and a constant principle for States.

In addition, it seems appropriate to raise certain considerations, which I consider important for us if we are to succeed in our task of protecting civilians in the context of current conflicts. First, the primary protection of civilians is, first and foremost, their security. Therefore, it is essential that all peacekeeping operations are able, both in terms of their human and material resources and of their mandates, to ensure and defend the security and lives of citizens, both civilian and military, living in areas of operations. It is therefore up to us to question ourselves, above all, about the relevance of mandates that we initiate. We should get beyond the quasi-standard templates and ensure that for every situation, for every context, there is an appropriate peacekeeping mandate.

The example of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), right at our borders, demonstrates, if need be, that major operations can be put in place and prove inadequate or ineffective in the actual context. We must now question the MINUSMA mandate as designed and as MINUSMA has operated thus far. Today, a condition for the security of Malian and border populations is to change the force's mandate or to put in place a force modelled on the multinational joint task force that we established in the Lake Chad Basin to confront Boko Haram.

My second observation is derived from the first. Only an appropriate offensive mandate specific to each context can constitute the basis for the protection of civilians. The third observation is that States have the primary responsibility to protect their populations. In that context, the United Nations must do more to strengthen those States' capacity to act, as well as that of regional organizations in that regard. We must strengthen and give priority to States in all circumstances, subjecting them, of course, to the obligations of international morality and universal rights, but always considering States as the primary and essential instruments for the protection of civilians. Whenever States are weakened, the situation of civilians in conflict becomes problematic.

The fourth element of our reflections concerns the substance of the protection of civilians in conflict. In our view, in addition to preserving the security and lives of people, the protection of civilians must be understood as including access to basic social services, the protection of their human rights and the strengthening of the resilience of populations in conflict areas. Costs and arrangements for the protection of civilians must include the costs and arrangements for the minimum social services needed to ensure a decent life for every citizen.

The fifth observation is that, even if there is reason to recognize the role that non-governmental organizations can play in the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in particular because of their capacity for local communication, the fact remains that action or interventions by the latter should not be undertaken at the expense of the sovereignty of States and their primary responsibility in that regard.

Sixthly, I would like for the United Nations to regard assisting countries in conflict with the care of refugees and internally displaced persons as a matter of utmost urgency. As a result, with the actions of Boko Haram in the east and the jihadists in Mali, the Niger, while doing battle with terrorists on all fronts, must care for and accommodate more than 300,000 refugees and internally displaced persons. Therefore, prevention, predictability and the need for a rapid response also seem to us to be indispensable to ensuring the effective protection of civilians. We have the obligation to prevail on both fronts of our battle: defeating the terrorists and protecting civilian populations. If today we are discussing the protection of civilians, it is because there are conflicts. There are wars that are taking place.

Today, on behalf of the Republic of the Niger, I would like to thank all the countries that help and support us in the struggle against terrorists, our struggle for the security of our country, our region and the world. Terrorists know no borders. I would therefore like to express my appreciation in particular to France, the United States, Chad, the European Union, the countries of the G5-Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin countries and all the many countries that I cannot mention here. May they find here the expression of our gratitude, which is an expression of our solidarity and capacity for generosity aimed at ensuring the triumph of a society of peace and freedom.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus.

Mr. Kasoulides (Cyprus): Cyprus aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

The need to protect civilians in armed conflict is obvious. However, despite the progress made, the situation of civilians in armed conflict today remains a major concern, as highlighted in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/447). The lack of respect for international humanitarian law and the persistent impunity are among the reasons given for that situation.

The protection of civilians is an inherent obligation in all United Nations peacekeeping operations and is currently part of the mandate of 10 such missions. Nevertheless, the role played by the United Nations should not allow us to lose sight of the fact that the protection of civilians is primarily the responsibility of States.

Since 1964, my country has been home to a peacekeeping operation, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, whose mandate includes provisions on humanitarian activities. Cyprus is grateful to the United Nations and to troop-contributing countries for their support. Our experience feeds into our understanding of the difficulties that the implementation of a peacekeeping operation mandate may be faced with.

Effectiveness is part of the mandate and must be linked to political solutions and include viable exit strategies and always be guided by the situation on the ground. Mandates must be clear, consistent and concise, with realistic provisions; they must be accompanied by operational guidelines and include provisions on human rights when relevant.

Furthermore, the need for training on the issues related to the protection of civilians, including sexual violence in conflict and the protection of children, cannot be underestimated. Moreover, the staff of a mission must also strictly abide by human rights standards. In that context, we fully support the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual abuse in peacekeeping operations.

Relationships based on trust with local communities and organizations can contribute to the prevention of crimes against civilians and can enable us to address the consequences of violations against civilians. Peacekeeping operations can also help a host country to implement its responsibility to protect and support the work of the International Criminal Court when it is involved in a host country.

Finally, States Members of the United Nations and regional and international organizations also have a key role to play that complements peacekeeping operations in the areas of conflict prevention, early warning and reaction. In that context, Cyprus committed itself at the World Humanitarian Summit to using diplomacy to prevent conflict and has lent its full support to the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Burkinabé Abroad of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Barry (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate your country, France, for its accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June and to thank you, Sir, for the invitation to take part in this open debate.

The theme of this high-level discussion, namely, the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations, is of great importance for us, as it is for the entire international community. Indeed, with nearly 3,000 — 2,901 to be exact — soldiers and police currently deployed in various theatres of operation, Burkina Faso ranks sixteenth in the world as a troop- and police-contributing country and is the fourth largest contributor from the African continent. We have a battalion in Darfur and two battalions in Mali within the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. We also have police units, one of which is deployed in the Economic Community of West African States Mission in Guinea-Bissau, where it is participating in the efforts aimed at political stabilization in Guinea-Bissau, which is very difficult.

Burkina Faso hosts on its soil 34,000 refugees from Mali, and every time there is an upheaval in northern Mali, civilians flee into our country, which shares over 1,000 kilometres of border with that neighbouring State. As a former journalist, I have witnessed in person the despair of civilian populations dealing with war in Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, and I have witnessed people seeking shelter, care and food; people fleeing and crossing borders in search of peace and tranquillity. I have also witnessed gestures of hope, soldiers releasing people from oppression and reassuring them that they would protect and help them — in short, doing what peacekeepers do. Therefore, we must welcome the role of the United Nations and all other organizations, including the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States.

The responsibilities for better protecting civilians in peacekeeping operations are shared and spread across various levels. First, in any conflict, it is important for the parties to the conflict, whether States or not, to fulfil their responsibilities vis-à-vis international law and international humanitarian law. The four Geneva

Conventions and the two Additional Protocols provide us with a solid basis both for preventing massive human rights violations and for holding parties to the conflict accountable for war crimes and similar crimes. For us, fulfilling those obligations is the best way to support peacekeeping operations in theatres where a decision to deploy them has been made.

On the ground, peacekeeping operations can indeed be very useful in the protection of civilians, although it should be remembered that the responsibility for that lies first with host States. The contribution of peacekeepers can take the form of support to existing local and community-based security mechanisms. It can take the form of military and police action, such as patrols, or logistical support in the area of communication or protecting a refugee camp. In a more long-term perspective, the implementation of capacity-building programmes, with the aim of providing the defence and security forces of host countries with the skills they need to carry out their sovereign functions, is the most sustainable approach.

Finally, with regard to the role of the United Nations as a whole and that of the Security Council, I must also mention the many initiatives that are being taken to ensure that the protection of civilians is the cornerstone of United Nations action in its peacekeeping operations. The Secretary-General's Rights Up Front initiative, the zero-tolerance policy with regard to sexual violence, the deployment of advisers on the protection of civilians in some peacekeeping operations, and the initiatives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to evaluate progress in the implementation of the mandates are welcome initiatives.

However, despite all those efforts, the picture is not bright and calls on us to do more. The Security Council must develop clear mandates for the protection of civilians and ensure that missions are equipped not only with sufficient resources to execute them, but also with the provisions they need to put those resources in place. I say that because our troops in Darfur, for example, no longer have sufficient food rations. The American representative mentioned that earlier, but unfortunately, this is not the first time that has happened. When it happened, we were obliged to send money to our soldiers in Darfur to enable them to directly purchase what they needed to eat. If we need to maintain a sufficient level of morale for our troops as they protect civilians, they must have the necessary means, including the means of subsistence and nourishment.

It is also important to be realistic and flexible and to change a mission's mandate whenever it is required by the reality on the ground. We are pleased that those elements were given due attention in the various reviews conducted in 2015, which seek to present a different face of United Nations peacekeeping operations, namely that of human-centred operations on the ground. In the case of Mali, which is of concern because it is very close to my country, Burkina Faso, we welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation to increase by 2,500 the personnel of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We call on the Economic Community of West African States to strengthen MINUSMA so as to make it more robust, more aggressive and better suited to the situation in northern Mali. That request is all the more immediate and important to us, since Burkina Faso suffers collaterally from the ongoing crisis in northern Mali.

In a single year, we have suffered a dozen terrorist attacks on our borders, targeting civilians, police and gendarmerie posts. The last one took place at night on 31 May. There were three victims, all police officers. The most tragic attack, also related to the situation in Mali, took place in Ouagadougou, an attack in January on the Cappuccino Restaurant and Splendid Hotel, in which 32 people died, all civilians.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the readiness of my country, Burkina Faso, to continue to support the actions of the international community in the field of peacekeeping. I welcome the adoption of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, to which my country has acceded. I would also like to acknowledge and thank our partners present here, whose multifaceted support has always been crucial in the predeployment training of troops and police deployed to the peacekeeping theatres of operation. It is my hope that this exchange will contributes significantly to our thinking on ways to lessen the untold suffering inflicted on humans, which cannot be justified under any pretext.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Benin.

Mr. Agbenonci (Benin) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Sir, for the invitation to participate in this open debate on the protection of civilians in periods of armed conflict. I would like to extend my warm congratulations to you on behalf of the President of the Republic of Benin, Mr. Patrice Talon, on your assumption of the rotating presidency of the Security Council. I also wish to acknowledge and welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, the Secretary-General, and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The issue on the agenda today for this open debate is of crucial importance, given the purposes and principles of the United Nations, whose primary mission is to save succeeding generations from armed conflicts, which unfortunately continue to be a blight on humanity. In view of the mass atrocities committed in hot spots around our planet, it is not surprising that your country, France, the birthplace of human rights, has decided to make the issue of the protection of civilians a major theme of its presidency of the Security Council.

The stakes are high, and no one can remain indifferent in the light of the multiple serious violations of international humanitarian law and of the principle of the inviolability of United Nations troops. Such violations have been effected by Government forces and by extremist non-State groups, which, in the cross-fire of attempting to destabilize States, also target peaceful civilian populations.

The increasing efforts deployed by the United Nations to strengthen the protection of civilians as part of peacekeeping operations shows the willingness on the part of the international community to strengthen the capacity of countries to prevent gross violations of human rights affecting civilian populations in conflict situations. In that context, matching the real threats with the Security Council's mandates and the measures deployed for implementing them are a problem to which it is important to find appropriate solutions.

In addition to military means, the use of which is bound by the rules of engagement, the issue of the protection of civilians must be consistently addressed on the agenda as a cross-cutting and multidimensional concern. As such, it must be integrated into all decision-making processes regarding the management of conflict situations. It is up to those responsible for the mission to be aware of and define the sources of instability and the deep roots of the threats and to neutralize them. That could entail carrying out measures to anticipate threats and acting to mediate and identify measures to contain or avoid the escalation of violence.

Given the genuine limits on the use of force, soft-power methods can be much more effective in certain cases, as they make it possible, for example, to maintain a dialogue between protagonists. The passive use of military force could add to the deterrent function. The value of mobilizing and engaging potential trouble-making factions in income-generating activities has been proven and demonstrated by the effectiveness of rapid impact projects. That has worked, in my experience, in the context of peacekeeping operations in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, a thought that came to mind when I was considering the subject and related issues in the concept note (S/2016/502, annex) prepared for this open debate.

On the second question, I must stress that relationships with local actors and non-governmental organizations, on the one hand, and with regional and international organizations, on the other, are important channels of influence, but must be used with caution, so that they can become factors that can help anticipate, manage and stabilize situations at risk. In that regard, the contribution of non-governmental organizations that deploy and manage early-warning mechanisms is highly appreciated. They deserve to be duly taken into account as full partners on the ground. Support for those mechanisms could be a powerful lever to ensure the protection of civilians.

Furthermore, it is also important to understand that humanitarian actors can play a key role in the joint implementation of quick-impact projects, which can help to strengthen a constructive partnership between them and the missions. Precautionary measures are necessary so as to ensure that humanitarian actors can maintain their separate identity on the ground as well as their own rules of operation. I [illegible] think that more importance should be attached to awareness-raising and information-sharing measures among local and international stakeholders in potential areas of tension where there might be risks to the civilian population.

The latest generation of integrated missions has received explicit mandates to ensure the protection of civilians, but it is necessary that those mandates be regularly assessed so as to ensure that they are adapted to the actual situations. In order to increase the suitability of Council resolutions, their elaboration ought to include a meticulous assessment of the situation at issue with the involvement of regional and subregional organizations, which have the advantage of being closer to the reality on the ground, of having a better understanding of the intangibles and of being able to weigh the local significance.

Affected troops assigned to protect civilians must receive appropriate training as well, particularly in order to ensure the proportionality of their responses to anticipated threats. It is important that those troops be well equipped and psychologically well prepared to assume their responsibilities. In that regard, the Government of Benin would like to express its support for the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which underscore the good practices of troop-contributing countries in efforts to protect civilians.

Those are my thoughts on the theme of this open debate. I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to speak, to contribute to finding a solution to the serious challenges facing the international community, which is currently confronted with various trouble spots. I would like to conclude by stressing the importance of the issue of the protection of civilians, which should remain on the Security Council agenda, so that there can be more in-depth thinking on it and regular exchanges on the topic, given its importance for the credibility of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Ms. Plowmen (Netherlands): I thank France for putting the protection of civilians on the agenda of the Security Council. This extremely important topic is at the heart of the work of the United Nations. While the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and with the statement by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians, I would like to make some remarks in my national capacity.

In his report (S/2016/447) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Secretary-General presents us with a shocking truth, that is, more than ever before, warring parties are targeting civilians, and too many perpetrators are still getting away with it. The international community cannot let such crimes go unpunished. It must provide justice to the victims, and it must issue a credible warning to those considering violence against civilians: war crimes will be punished. That is why the recent conviction of Hissène Habré for crimes against humanity, war crimes and torture by the Special Tribunal in Senegal is such an important step. That is also why the Netherlands fully supports the legal institutions in The Hague and elsewhere that help achieve justice.

The report confirms our worst fears about conflict-related sexual violence. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable, especially when they are displaced and seek refuge in another country. They can fall victim to human trafficking, abuse and forced prostitution. That includes women and girls in Europe. I fully support the Secretary-General's call to redouble our efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and take action to stop it.

That is no easy task. In South Sudan, for instance, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is fulfilling an almost impossible duty. A small number of troops and police are having to protect around 200,000 displaced persons at designated sites near UNMISS bases. During a visit to Malakal less than two years ago, I had an opportunity to witness at first hand the challenges that peacekeepers were up against. I saw that people faced the greatest dangers, including sexual violence, when they had to move around — when searching for water, food and firewood, for example. But UNMISS was already struggling to secure the designated site, mainly due to limited capacity. The mandate to protect civilians was translated into physically securing the area, even though the biggst threats to people's safety were just outside that area.

The tragic incident at Malakal in February 2016 proves once again the need for proactive actions by peacekeepers, based on prudent intelligence. We look forward to the outcomes of the special investigation by the United Nations. Those responsible for making fatal mistakes should be held accountable.

United Nations missions around the world face similar dilemmas, namely, how to give civilians sufficient freedom of movement while at the same time offering sufficient protection. Although the protection of civilians is part and parcel of mandates, peacekeepers often have to make do with very limited resources. Partly as a result of that, the protection of civilians risks becoming merely protection of sites — a necessary but clearly insufficient condition for keeping people safe and secure.

The gap between principle and practice is still too wide. I want to suggest four ways of closing that gap.

First, we have to be realistic. Blanket mandates to protect civilians are often neither credible nor achievable. All too often, expectations fail to match a mission's capabilities. A protection-of-civilians strategy and a specific plan of action should be in place after a mandate is adopted and before the mission is deployed. Furthermore, they should be updated regularly. The strategy should include close cooperation with actors on the ground, because that is the only way to protect civilians, both inside designated areas and beyond. It means working with partners — often non-governmental partners — that provide basic services. And it means joining forces with organizations that promote reconciliation and dialogue.

Secondly, implementation is key. The Security Council's Informal Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians should meet on a more regular basis to discuss specific missions. It should proactively advise the Council and offer proposals to improve protection. The Expert Group needs to be regularly briefed by protection-of-civilians advisers working on missions.

Thirdly, we also need a stronger link between the actors on the ground and the actors in New York. The Security Council should adopt a new system for more regular and more transparent briefings by troop-contributing countries and non-governmental organizations. Those briefings should take place well in advance of mandate renewals.

Fourthly, the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians deserve our full support. They constitute a political commitment by troop- and police-contributing countries to better train and equip their peacekeepers, to avoid caveats on protection-of-civilians mandates and to hold accountable those who do not carry out their mandate as they should. On 11 May the Netherlands held a high-level event, which resulted in 20 countries joining the original 9 countries that had endorsed the Kigali Principles. I am pleased that today several countries expressed their support for the Kigali Principles.

Along with Rwanda and United States Africa Command, the Netherlands is going to organize a training centred on the protection of civilians, with special attention to preventing and addressing sexual abuse and exploitation. We support the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy when it comes to such horrendous practices.

As a partner for peace, justice and development, the Kingdom of the Netherlands wants to contribute to further improving peacekeeping missions. That is a major reason for which we are a candidate for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the 2017-2018 term.

Let us not forget that, in the end, peacekeeping missions are about all those vulnerable men, women and children in conflict situations who depend on us, the United Nations, for their protection. Their concern should be the Council's main concern.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria.

Ms. Ibrahim (Nigeria): The Nigerian delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this very important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for the concept note (S/2016/503, annex) provided to guide our discussion. We also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. We acknowledge the important role of France, among others, on this issue, including our region, with the Multinational Joint Task Force. We appreciate the perspectives brought to the debate by His Excellency the President of the Central African Republic and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer.

United Nations peace operations are a vital part of the global security architecture. They have been a source of hope for victims of conflict. Vulnerable people living in conflict zones across the world count on the United Nations to protect them. With the growing number of people affected by conflict, that has become a challenge for the United Nations. To its credit, the Organization has taken bold steps to meet the challenge.

Nigeria is pleased to note the progress made, particularly at the normative level, since the Council took the historic step in 1999 to recognize the protection of civilians as central to the mandate of peacekeeping missions. Ten of the 16 current United Nations peacekeeping missions, involving more than 97 per cent of all United Nations peacekeepers, have the protection of civilians in their mandates. Resolution 1894 (2009), which calls for allocation of resources for the protection of civilians, is emblematic of the effort to translate normative commitments into concrete measures that enhance the protection of civilians in theatres of conflict.

The international community expects the United Nations to perform flawlessly when offering protection to civilians in conflict areas. However, the challenges faced by peacekeeping missions are often overlooked or not adequately appreciated. Indeed, challenges remain in the implementation of protection mandates in conflict areas. We support the continued engagement of the Security Council on the issue, and we see merit in the pragmatic and effective efforts to achieve constructive results to that end.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a task that involves multiple issues and requires the collective efforts of various stakeholders. At the strategic level, close collaboration among the Security Council, the United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations, troop- and police-contributing countries and individual United Nations peacekeeping missions is vital for the success of a protection-of-civilians mandate. Similarly, at the tactical level, close coordination among the various components of a peace mission is crucial to achieving success in the protection of civilians in conflict areas. It should be underscored that a clear and common understanding of protection mandates is fundamental to the effectiveness of strategic coordination among mission components.

While emphasizing the imperative for peacekeepers to act when civilians are under threat, we urge troop- and police-contributing countries to ensure that their personnel have the requisite predeployment training in protection issues. It is also important that peacekeepers not be restricted by additional caveats beyond those explicitly accepted by the Secretariat before deployment.

Nigeria strongly supports community engagement in promoting the protection of civilians. Community-alert networks and community-liaison assistants are vital to understanding perceptions of threat at the community level, including how communities seek to reduce risks and how peace operations can address them. We would like to see the international community recognize those imperatives.

Nigeria is firmly committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and recognizes the primary responsibility of States to protect civilians within their national jurisdictions. That conviction underlies our Government's resolve to take all measures necessary to protect civilians in the battle against the terrorist group Boko Haram and its likes. Indeed, the Government of Nigeria has no higher priority than to rescue all of the persons held hostage by that group.

Since the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force, considerable success has been recorded in the battle against Boko Haram. Over a thousand kidnapped women and children have been rescued, and all territories once controlled by the group have been recovered. Despite the enormous efforts made by the Nigerian Government and the member States of the Lake Chad Basin Commission as well as by the Republic of Benin, we believe that more still needs to be done. We recognize the imperative for internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups to be provided with adequate protection, as anything short of that could expose them to further abuse. We therefore call on the international community to continue to support the efforts of the Multinational Joint Task Force to protect civilians in the course of their intricate assignment.

In conclusion, Nigeria salutes the courage of peacekeepers, who work tirelessly, usually under very challenging circumstances, to keep civilians safe. We pay tribute to the men and women who have lost their lives while serving in United Nations peacekeeping missions, and we offer our deep condolences to their families, their friends and their Governments.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Alam: (Bangladesh) I thank the President for inviting us to this high-level open debate in the Security Council. We look forward to a successful French presidency of the Council under his leadership this month. I also thank the briefers for their thought-provoking observations today. We look forward to the Secretary-General's report on the organization-wide response to the Agenda for Humanity, including on the protection of civilians.

Only a few days back, as we do every year in our capital, we observed the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers in a fitting manner. It was a sobering occasion for recalling the invaluable role played by our peacekeepers, often in difficult situations where there is no peace to keep.

I had the opportunity last year to attend the International Conference on the Protection of

Civilians in Kigali, Rwanda. Earlier in the year, we had the chance to interact with the members of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, as we hosted them in Dhaka for their Asia-Pacific regional consultations.

It has been personally quite rewarding to follow the developments concerning the protection of civilians in the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations. In Bangladesh, we have embraced the notion of protecting civilians in terms of our contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations as a matter of principle and pragmatism. We have the haunting memory of 3 million of our people killed during our War of Liberation in 1971, which we do not wish to see repeated anywhere else in the world. It is unacceptable to think that civilians come under armed attack in a situation where our peacekeepers remain deployed. Our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina therefore never thought twice when, at the peacekeeping summits that she has co-chaired over the last two years, she committed to the mainstreaming of the protection-of-civilians mandate in peacekeeping training for our troops and police. As a lead troop-contributing country, we consider it our responsibility to lead by example and, at times, venture into untested territories. Our endorsement of the Kigali Principles on Protection of Civilians was largely guided by that perspective. Our initiative to take steps forward with our personnel- and capability-readiness arrangements has been prompted by our continued efforts to strive for the better.

In line with our value-driven engagement in United Nations peacekeeping operations, Bangladesh wishes to remain one of the first responders to the United Nations call for troops, police and capabilities. We commit ourselves to discharging the tasks mandated by the Council without any caveats. We remain aware of the growing and complex challenges in the environments in which we operate. Yet we make it a point to stand our ground, as we continue to do in Mali and in the Central African Republic.

We see the real need for intelligence and technologies to serve our troops' vital interests on the ground, particularly so as to enhance their capacity for protecting civilians and ensure their own safety and security. We stand ready to constructively support the work of developing an enabling policy and operational frameworks on those issues in a transparent and consultative manner.

As has been noted, much work has already been done on developing a set of norms and guidelines for protecting civilians in peacekeeping operations. But there remain certain gaps between policies and practice. It has often been a challenge to get the mandates spelled out in clear terms, which leaves them open to interpretation in the field. It is therefore important for the Council to occasionally review the mandates in close consultation with host Governments, troop- and police-contributing countries and the United Nations Secretariat. In that context, we wish to thank the French delegation for holding informal consultations with the troop-contributing countries concerned in its capacity as the penholder for resolution 2227 (2015) on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

It is crucial that mandate design and review be guided by the strategic analysis and assessment of the threats to civilians, based on real-time feedback from the field. On the other hand, there must be sufficient leverage for field missions to develop their respective strategies and targets within the broader framework of the mandates set by the Council. Mission leaderships need to be empowered enough to ensure coherent mission-wide approaches to protecting civilians. The protection mandate demands a corresponding investment in building the capacity of missions, including for situational awareness, threat assessment, strategic planning, timely information and communication, and needs-based training. It is important that the necessary resources and capabilities be made available to missions to enable them to fulfil their mandated tasks.

It would be quite impractical, however, to expect that United Nations peacekeeping operations would be the only answer to protecting civilians. That would hardly be fair, since peacekeeping missions must operate within certain principles, parameters and limitations. It may be justified to hold peacekeepers responsible if they fail to deliver in a given circumstance, but it is neither feasible nor perhaps desirable for peacekeepers to bear the burden of protecting civilians when that is essentially the responsibility of national Governments. It is important that peacekeepers be made aware of whom to protect, where to protect and in partnership with whom. The Council and mission leaderships have a shared responsibility to manage expectations and disseminate the right information so as to avoid confusion, especially among local populations.

There is often room for peacekeeping missions to contribute to building the capacity of national authorities and other local actors in protecting civilians. There may also be potential for working in collaboration with relevant regional or international actors deployed on the front lines. Such scenarios need to be carefully mapped out and worked through in the course of mandate design and implementation.

It is critical for peacekeepers and humanitarian actors to work in tandem in a protection crisis so as to be able to respond to the particular needs of those affected, especially women, children and the elderly. We resolutely condemn any disruption of or barriers against the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilian populations under any pretext. The commitments made in that regard at the World Humanitarian Summit last month must be followed through in a coherent, coordinated and inclusive manner among all concerned actors.

That also brings us to the bigger question of considering the role of peacekeepers in protecting civilians within a focused and far-reaching political approach to sustaining peace. Peacekeepers can be tasked with firefighting in the case of an emergency, but the threat of such protection crises will continue to remain as long as the underlying political drivers of conflict or breaching of peace are not effectively addressed.

The Council must remain seized with such broader political issues in order to prevent a recurrence of protection challenges and to lend credibility to ission mandates on a sustained basis.

For us, protecting civilians in the peacekeeping context is something much more fundamental and serious than mere mandate implementation. I recall my visit to the Genocide Museum in Kigali and the harrowing tales and reminiscent of the international community's failure to protect innocent civilians from mass atrocity crimes. We must continue to use such powerful memorial tools to renew our commitment to protecting civilians, and doing it right:

Bangladesh pledges to do its part as best it can.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister of State for Cooperation of Rwanda.

Mr. Gasana (Rwanda): Let me begin by commending your country, Sir, for convening this important debate, which provides us with an opportunity to exchange views on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I believe that in the past months we have come closer to wholeheartedly embracing a progressive protection-of-civilians agenda.

The Council may recall that, on 14 May, 20 new troop- and police-contributing countries pledged their unwavering commitment to protecting civilians by supporting the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. Their affirmation validates the prioritization of protection of civilian mandates. As we tread forward, we will continue to seek the support of countries, like France, that bear witness to the important role the Kigali Principles can play in the field. When lives are at stake, we must act.

The plight of civilians is increasing, which means that our actions must not simply match but exceed the needs on the ground for long-term changes to materialize. It is not the armed actors or rebels, or even factions that most suffer in today's conflicts, bur rather civilians. It is not the towns that have been plummeted or the waterlines that have been shut off that most devastate a community; rather, it is the loss of innocent lives, of neighbours, of loved ones who could have been you, or me, or anyone here in the Chamber.

The violence facing civilians is growing in magnitude, intensity and frequency, while the majority of our actions in response remain the same. I believe that in adhering to the Kigali Principles we can implement the changes needed to see a real impact. That, in turn, will prove to civilians that their needs can be met and surpassed with sound, effective and consistent peacekeeping.

On a strategic level, there are necessary improvements to our peacekeeping missions that can produce clear and achievable mandates.

First, we should produce clear and achievable mandates. That requires thoroughly assessing the needs on the ground and then pairing them appropriately with the roles and responsibilities of peacekeepers. Embedding phased and sequenced mandates into the process will ensure that the protection of civilians remains a top priority and is not constrained by other tasks or a lack of adequate resources.

Secondly, the Security Council must oversee that all phases of the mandate include political solutions that will allow the country to move forward, guaranteeing that a relapse is not imminent. If prevention work is coupled with a substantial and consistent investment in understanding the root causes of conflicts, we can stop history from repeating itself and once and for all eliminate the reopening of historic wounds.

Thirdly, peacekeepers have a right to clear and intelligible tasks that ensure the effective and thorough protection of civilians. That will also aid peacekeepers in comprehending how and why perpetrators may attack civilians, so that their responses can be intelligent and tailored. We can all attest to hearing stories of peacekeepers who have been spread too thin or who are ill-equipped to protect civilians. Although their intentions are selfless and courageous, we are not doing our jobs correctly if they are on the ground with only those two values to shield them from threats and other dangers.

Fourthly, we fully subscribe to applicable and contemporary training during predeployment and in-mission that includes the protection of civilians and sexual exploitation and abuse. If peacekeepers are properly trained on sexual exploitation and abuse, a culture will develop among peacekeepers that seek for them to exercise good judgment and holds them completely accountable for any misconduct.

Fifthly, mission leadership must also be strengthened so that an effective chain of command can develop and respond to any threat or danger to civilians. That undeniably empowers uniformed peacekeepers to take the necessary measures to save lives rather than fearing the consequences of misjudged actions.

That leads me to one of the most important points of the debate, namely, the unimpeded use of force. A pattern of not intervening when civilians are under attack must not and cannot become the norm. As one of the Kigali Principles denotes, troops should be

> "prepared to use force to protect civilians, as necessary and consistent with the mandate."

That includes a show of deterrence to the inter-positioning of forces between armed actors and civilians. Clarity behind that principle will allow peacekeepers to discern and respond to armed violence. We owe it to peacekeepers and the civilians whose lives are at stake to have a clear and synchronized understanding of the use of force by the Security Council, the Secretariat and troop- and police-contributing countries.

Civilians expect peacekeepers to use force when their lives are threatened. When armed violence escalates, we must act. That proactive stance to peacekeeping will reap many benefits, including preventing future conflicts or further escalation of current ones.

Lastly, we must become more centred if we are to undertake missions with mandates that seek to protect people. We must dispose of the old ways that hindered our thinking and halted decision-making or decision-taking that could have saved lives. Let us also inspire our peacekeepers to continue engaging with civilians to fortify their relationship with and trust in us. This will result in the collection of data and other intelligence that is invaluable to any peacekeeping mission.

Rwanda, as a top troop- and police-contributing country, and as a nation that witnessed first-hand the grave shortcomings of the United Nations, let me caution against not taking action. Remaining silent is a response. It conveys either complete disinterest or complete apathy. We have gathered here today to take stock of what is needed to succeed. Under the auspices of the recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, the Secretary-General's subsequent report and the best practices embedded in the Kigali Principles, the way forward has been paved for us.

Now is the time to act and respond strategically and swiftly. We welcome all those gathered here today that have yet to endorse the Kigali Principles to join us in subscribing to them. The way forward may be filled with uncertainties and new challenges that attempt to rob us of our faith and values. Let us not allow for either. Let us move in a manner that speaks to our strengths. Today, let us choose a way forward that most effectively protects the lives of all civilians, for, as His Excellency President Paul Kagame has said, "The central purpose of peace operations is the protection of civilians. This cannot be said often enough".

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Argentina.

Mr. Foradori (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International development of France, His Excellency Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, for having convened this high-level open debate on an issue to which Argentina attaches a great deal of importance in its capacity as a country contributing troops and police to peacekeeping operations, which we have done for almost 60 years now.

We have also been a consistent promoter of full respect for human rights and for international humanitarian law.

Likewise, we welcome the statements delivered by his Excellency the President of the Central African Republic, the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The protection-related tasks of the United Nations have a central role to play in the context of the new emphasis placed by the Organization on conflict prevention and the achievement of sustainable peace and development, on the basis of the three reviews that took place focusing on peacekeeping operations, peacebuilding and the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. There can be no doubt that such protection tasks, particularly those carried out by peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, are vital when it comes to sustaining peace before, during and after conflict.

In this task, for which host States themselves have the primary responsibility, it is crucial that we have the participation of all relevant national actors, in particular civil society, bearing in mind the key role of women and youth in conflict prevention and in the maintenance and building of peace.

The protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations has a different focus than does the protection of civilians in the framework of international humanitarian law. This has become a hot topic of discussion over the past few years, particularly given its link to the use of armed force.

Against that backdrop and in line with the recommendation contained in the report (S/2015/446) of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, which is also acknowledged in this latest report, it is clear that the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations constitutes an integrated effort on the part of a mission as a whole, requiring primarily close cooperation between the military, police and civilian components, in coordination with Governments, local communities and the humanitarian organizations on the ground.

My country therefore understands that this issue cannot be considered from a purely military perspective but has to be understood from a broader and more integrated political and humanitarian perspective that is focused on the fostering of a more secure environment for protection. In such an environment, the use of force, which is sometimes necessary in order to avert tragedies such as those in Srebrenica and in Rwanda, where peacekeeping operations failed the people they were supposed to defend, constitutes a measure of last resort when other, non-military alternatives fail.

Also on the basis of other recommendations contained in the Panel's report, we underscore the importance of non-armed strategies for the protection of civilians in order to move peace processes forward, as well as the creation of the aforementioned climate of protection.

We believe that there can be an improvement in many aspects of the implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates in peacekeeping operations, among which we would underscore the specific training of troop and police contingents. We acknowledge the efforts of the Secretariat in devising guidelines and doctrinal frameworks for such training. We reiterate the need for broad-based consultations thereon with Member States, particularly police- and troop-contributing countries, because they will have to use them.

The effective protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations also requires unwavering political will, effective cooperation at the regional level, the better equipping of contingents, more specific and central planning tailored to the challenges on the ground, and the use of new technologies, in keeping with the principles of the Charter and of peacekeeping. All of this is of course closely linked to the adequate financing of such missions.

What happens regarding the protection of civilians anywhere in the world is not a matter of indifference for the Argentine delegation, because it affects all of us directly. That is why Argentina supports, in this area and in others, the principle of non-indifference among States. We cannot continue to lead from behind; we must roll out a solid, collective policy that ensures accurate diagnoses in order to promote specific therapeutic actions.

When civilians in desperate situations approach Blue Helmets, the basic minimum they expect from them is protection. Our responsibility as Member States is to create effective tools so that peacekeeping operations do not fail to live up to that expectation and serve to create a sustainable protection environment. We must be equal to the circumstances and know how to respond to those who require the protection of the United Nations. We in the United Nations must be smart enough to prevent, strong enough to implement and secure enough to lead. This is our collective obligation.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Deputy Foreign Minister for Multilateral and Global Affairs of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Choi Jong-moon (Republic of Korea): The Republic of Korea appreciates the timely initiative of France to convene today's high-level open debate on protecting civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations. I thank His Excellency Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault for having come to New York to preside over today's debate. It is a testimony to France's enduring commitment to effective United Nations peacekeeping operations and the universal promotion of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Korea also appreciates the thorough briefing by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. We commend his leadership in guiding the three landmark reviews on peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture and resolution 1325 (2000). In particular, we strongly support his initiative to place high priority on the protection-of-civilians mandate in United Nations peace operations.

I also thank President Touadera of the Central African Republic and International Committee of the Red Cross President Maurer for their invaluable remarks on this very important issue today.

The Republic of Korea is deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale of civilian casualties from armed conflicts around the world. In fact, under the Korean presidency in February 2013, the Council adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2013/2, on protection of civilians. It focused on fighting impunity, implementing peacekeeping protection mandates, and establishing a regular reporting cycle for the Secretary-General's reports. Despite the growing emphasis on the importance of the protection of civilians, the reality on the ground is quite troublesome. Peacekeepers in South Sudan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan still face great difficulties in carrying out their protection of civilians mandate.

Korea, as a long-standing troop-contributing country and major financial contributor, makes firm commitments to finding ways that will allow the United Nations to carry out its mandate successfully. Korea organized a series of meetings in New York and Seoul last year to this effect. Findings from those meetings provided inputs for the high-level thematic debate on peace and security organized by the President of the General Assembly last month. Allow me to briefly introduce some of the findings, which are also in line with the concept note for today's debate.

First, peacekeeping protection of civilians mandates should reflect the context on the ground instead of following pre-existing templates. Related to this point, deeper engagements with relevant stakeholders, including local communities, were emphasized in order to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Secondly, analytical function needs to be strengthened during the pre-mandate planning stage. Thirdly, there is a need for the Security Council to prioritize and consider sequenced mandates that can make Security Council resolutions more realistic and implementable. Fourthly, the training, capacities and responsibility of troops were identified as an area that must be explored further, especially in light of the recent cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. Indeed, this is a grave concern for all of us. Korea concurs with all of these findings and urges Security Council members to seriously consider these and other similar recommendations that emerged from various processes that followed the 2015 review.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/447) laments the fact that humanitarian needs are at a record high and more than 80 per cent of United Nations humanitarian funding is directed at conflict response. Faced with such a daunting challenge, Korea joined other Member States to build up the momentum generated by the World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul, Turkey in May. During the summit, we pledged to expand our support for conflict prevention and humanitarian assistance.

Furthermore, Korea, along with the co-host, Timor Leste, is pleased to announce that the sixth annual meeting of the Global Network of Responsibility to Protect Focal Points will be held in Seoul on June 20 to 22. It will be the first of its kind to take place in Asia, and will bring together senior officials responsible for facilitating national mechanisms for atrocity prevention, with much of the discussion to be focused on the protection of civilians.

In closing, Korea is deeply concerned by the lack of protection of civilians caused by the devastating conditions inside Syria's besieged and hard-to-reach areas. We support the French and Mexican initiative on veto restraint, as well as the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, and urge the members of the Security Council to take timely and decisive action to protect civilians in conflict-affected regions.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Braun (Germany) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank France for organizing this important debate. I also thank all the eminent experts for their valuable and informative briefings.

Germany aligns itself with the statements delivered by the European Union and Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends.

It is imperative that we significantly strengthen our commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, as summed up perfectly by the Secretary-General in his current report. The protection of civilians is among the most urgent tasks of peacekeeping. In order to carry out the task, four pillars are required, in Germany's view.

First, there is the central role of the Security Council. It is the responsibility of the Council to deeply entrench the protection of civilians in the mandates of peacekeeping operations and to support these operations at the political and operational levels when a heightened threat to civilians is obvious. Furthermore, where national criminal prosecution mechanisms fail, it must also ensure the application of international law in the event of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The aim is to send a clear message: attacks targeting civilians will not go unpunished.

Secondly, there is a need to ensure the safety of members of peacekeeping forces. The mission in Mali is a perfect illustration of this growing threat. This year alone, terrorists have killed 12 Blue Helmets and countless civilians in targeted attacks. By adding 400 soldiers with state-of-the-art equipment to the German contingent of the United Mission Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), we underscore the determination of our commitment to this mission and to the civilian population.

Thirdly, peacekeeping operations must adopt good practices. Germany shares the concerns expressed by the Secretary-General in his latest report and supports his call to undertake more effective measures to improve the protection of civilians. Germany therefore welcomes the formulation of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. Yesterday, my Mission forwarded a note verbale regarding our support for the Kigali Principles to the Permanent Mission of Rwanda here in New York.

Fourthly, police activities must be strengthened. The police play a crucial role in peacekeeping operations, particularly with regard to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Germany therefore welcomes the current evaluation report on the United Nations Police Division. The report contains extensive recommendations on the strengthening of that police force. We are confident that the Secretariat will not delay in implementing them. In conclusion, Sir, Germany shares your view that it is necessary to assign greater responsibility to the United Nations and the international community in the protection of civilian persons. Doing so requires conceptual work, in which Germany will continue to participate fully.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Kuspan (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in French*): I thank the French presidency for convening this open debate on the issue of the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations. Today, armed conflicts are marked by systematic violence and mass atrocities against civilian populations. Therefore, the protection of civilian populations constitutes a major challenge to the ability of the United Nations and of its peacekeeping operations.

My delegation would like to share a few thoughts in response to the four issues identified in the concept note of the French presidency. Kazakhstan already supports the effective implementation of three United Nations reviews, namely, on peacekeeping operations, on the peacebuilding architecture in 2000 and on resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. In order to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions in the protection of civilians, it is necessary to ensure a close synergy of the Security Council with those missions well before preparing their mandates. In particular, it is important to define the nature of the threats that a mission will have to deal with on the ground, the duration of the operation and the goals that must be achieved to clearly plan a multidimensional or hybrid mission.

The Security Council should adopt a strategy focused on crisis management planning, which involves military personnel and is then supported later by the Department of Political Affairs. The special representatives of the Secretary-General must have a clear and strong mandate to protect civilians. This will allow the host countries to become involved and firmly commit themselves. The local teams on the ground, together with the intergovernmental organizations; donor countries; and humanitarian, human rights and civil society organizations should reach an agreement as stakeholders.

The Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, their deputies and mission personnel at all levels, the force commanders and the countries deploying their personnel should know what their respective capacities are and ensure that their personnel receive special training courses through the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, as well as by Member States.

It is essential to focus on capacity-building in host countries, while adopting a road map for the protection of civilians at national and local levels. This requires a greater awareness among community leaders, women, young people and local communities to mobilize them to participate in peacekeeping operations. It also requires adequate resources and competent trainers. The training modules developed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, together with United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Oxfam and Save the Children, can be effectively used in this regard.

Kazakhstan proposes a broader use of the French language through an appeal for more of French speakers in peacekeeping operations. That will enable us to better communicate with the local population in certain countries.

The protection of civilians cannot be limited to physical defence; it must also protect the human dignity of women and children. The behaviour of peacekeepers must be impeccable with zero tolerance with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse, in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Secretary-General.

A conflict environment is almost always asymmetrical and dynamic. Peacekeeping operations are frequently called upon to protect civilians under very difficult and changing conditions. They are often faced with new threats which can only be addressed with the appropriate equipment — be it airborne, health-related or logistical. Their capacity to react should not be impeded by a low technical level.

The use of advanced technologies, such as unmanned aerial vehicles or digital satellite imagery, together with good media coverage, is fundamental to the success of such interventions. The recommendations of the Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in United Nations Peacekeeping show that clearly.

Inspired by the strong involvement of France, Kazakhstan joined the code of conduct proposed by the ACT group. As an observer country of the African Union, Kazakhstan is contributing to the protection of civilians by providing its highly trained military observers to the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara and to the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire. Before deploying on the ground, our military complete an appropriate United Nations training programme. We think that our presence will increase in the future.

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1) and Agenda 2063, Kazakhstan believes in a broader concept of peace and stability aimed at non-military and people-oriented security. It includes food, water and energy security, which together with nuclear safety, are the major pillars of our candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2017-2018.

On 31 March, the President of Kazakhstan published a manifesto, entitled "The World in the Twenty-first Century", in which he called on world leaders to put an end to all wars by creating fair global structures. This document is important in the context of the protection of civilians.

I would like to conclude by assuring the Council that Kazakhstan is committed to working together with the United Nations make the protection of civilians a top priority, in line with the Charter of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Chutikul (Thailand): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), comprising Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Viet Nam and my own country, Thailand.

I wish to express ASEAN's appreciation to the French presidency for organizing today's open debate on the topic of the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations and to all the briefers for their informative presentations.

As stated in your concept note (S/2016/503, annex), Mr. President, civilians remain the target of unacceptable violence in situations of armed conflict. The report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446) describes the protection of civilians in armed conflict as a core principle of international humanitarian law and a moral responsibility for the United Nations. In carrying out this responsibility, the majority of United Nations peacekeeping operations are now rightly mandated to protect civilians in their areas of deployment and within their capabilities.

Before responding to some of the questions raised in your concept note, ASEAN believes it is important to set the context and parameters. First, the host country has the primary responsibility to protect its own civilians. Secondly, United Nations peacekeepers' mandate to protect civilians is derived from resolutions of the Security Council. Finally, the three basic principles of United Nations peacekeeping constitute the framework within which the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations is carried out.

How can we achieve better protection of civilians? One of the key findings of the High-level Panel's report on the protection of civilians is that expectation and capability must converge. In this regard, ASEAN wishes to offer the following observations and suggestions.

First, as stressed by the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, we need to strengthen the triangular cooperation among the Security Council, troop- and police-contributing countries and the Secretariat. Each has a distinct and crucial, yet complementary and mutually reinforcing role. The Security Council has the responsibility to ensure that the protection mandate is well defined, achievable and backed with adequate resources. It should be prepared to review and adjust the mandate, taking into account the evolving situation and the views of the troop- and police-contributing countries.

Given the realities on the ground and the complexities of the issue, it is difficult for peacekeepers to fully understand the extent of their protection of civilians obligations and the required actions they need to take to implement it. Clear policy and implementation guidelines developed by the Secretariat are therefore instrumental in dispelling such uncertainties. In addition, the protection of civilians is not only the task of uniformed personnel. Mission leadership is also responsible for ensuring coherence and coordination among military, police and civilian components of the mission, in order to deliver a comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians.

Troop- and police-contributing countries, for their part, must undertake to train and prepare their peacekeepers to meet the standards of readiness, integrity and conduct required by the United Nations. ASEAN troop- and police-contributing countries reaffirm their commitment to properly train and equip their peacekeepers to effectively discharge the protection of civilians mandate.

Secondly, the protection of civilians does not necessarily mean the use of force. ASEAN underlines the relevance of unarmed strategies to protect civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations. We wish to highlight two aspects, namely, the early warning of potential risks to civilians and capacity-building for host State security institutions.

Having relevant, accurate and timely information, such as on incidents of human rights violations, allows peacekeeping operations to address imminent threats to civilians before they can actually harm them. Effective early warning can be achieved through human intelligence gathering and the appropriate use of technology. We emphasize the importance of interacting and developing positive relationships with the local population. The presence of female peacekeepers has proven time and again to be crucial to operational effectiveness in that regard.

Building a legitimate and effective State security sector, in particular the armed forces and police, is fundamental to the long-term prospects of creating a safe and secure environment for civilians. Therefore, peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities and capacity-building should be an integral part of the approach to the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations. The Security Council, in mandating such tasks, should give due regard to national priorities and conditions, in order to instil a sense of genuine ownership of the process.

In conclusion, ASEAN pays tribute to the men and women who have admirably dedicated their lives to protecting the lives of others. We honour their sacrifices and pledge to continue to work to strengthen United Nations peacekeeping, to better protect civilians and to ensure that peace will be secured and sustained.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Montenegro.

Mr. Šćepanović (Montenegro): I would like to thank the French presidency for organizing this open debate and for preparing the concept note (S/2016/503, annex) before us. I also thank the briefers for their valuable contribution to this debate.

My country fully associates itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union. I would like, however, to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

As stated in last year's report of the Secretary-General's report,

> "Despite some progress at the normative level, the general state of the protection of civilians on the ground remains bleak" (*S/2015453, para. 9*).

Civilians, unfortunately, account for the vast majority of victims of armed conflicts. We live in an era in which the extensive harm civilians endure and the widespread violations of international law during armed conflicts are almost accepted as a given, which is unacceptable. In trying to remedy that fact, allow me to single out the following two areas.

First is prevention and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. These are obviously the most effective way to protect civilians. Placing primacy on political solutions, as well as strengthening preventive measures, is therefore essential. That will, inter alia, require greater utilization of mediation and closer collaboration of the United Nations with regional arrangements.

When an end to violence is not possible, respect for international law is crucial to ensuring that human suffering is minimized. States and non-State armed groups have the duty to protect, not target, civilians and civilian objects, and to facilitate, not hinder, the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In that sense, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is especially concerning. All those who violate the law must be held accountable for their actions. Otherwise, violations will continue unabated. The Security Council should consider applying targeted measures against parties and individuals who systematically violate their obligations to protect civilians.

The second area I would like to focus on is the design and implementation of protection of civilian mandates. If we want to ensure that peacekeeping missions provide safety for civilians, protection of civilians mandates must be tailored to the conditions on the ground, rather than following a pre-established pattern. Missions operate in ever more complex environments, with peacekeepers being deployed in different types of dangerous situations. That calls for improved conflict analysis in the pre-mandate assessment phase, with particular emphasis on how United Nations missions can better respond to threats posed to civilians on the ground.

Peacekeepers must be given the resources and capabilities necessary to act more effectively through improved mobility, proper equipment and medical evacuation. New technologies can significantly help to improve the security and safety of peacekeepers and assets, as well as the United Nations capacity to protect civilians and implement mandates more effectively.

I would like to highlight the fact that Montenegro endorsed and fully supports Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. We hope that more countries will recognize the merits of the Principles in our common quest to further improve the implementation of protection of civilians mandates. We also expect that the entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty will contribute to alleviating the suffering of civilians by preventing irresponsible flows of weapons and ammunition to conflict-affected areas.

In conclusion, allow me to refer to cases of sexual exploitation in United Nations peacekeeping operations in the Central African Republic and other countries, which Montenegro strongly condemns. Such criminal activity and abuse has no place in United Nations flagship activities in any circumstances. It is our collective duty to ensure thorough investigations into those cases, accountability and justice for victims. Zero tolerance and zero impunity have to prevail as our only option in order not to tarnish the United Nations credibility again.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Lal (India): In the interest of brevity, I will limit my remarks. Our full statement will be available for circulation.

The protection of civilians is an integral part of the duties of all professional militaries that are raised in defence of peace and security for their people. In fact, military professionals are trained to save lives even in peacetime, in the event natural disasters or other man-made crises. We therefore believe that all peacekeeping operations are undertaken inherently to help protect civilians from being harmed.

While the protection of civilians has always been an important objective of all United Nations peacekeeping operations, the issue has raised increasing concern in recent times. That is due to the changing nature of conflict, which is moving away from inter-State armed conflicts to civil wars and the involvement of non-State actors, which have led to large-scale devastation in the lives of civilian populations. It is a matter of concern that most of those situations are proving too difficult to be resolved completely, often due to the breakdown of national governance structures within the country, as well as the inability of the international community and the Security Council to facilitate sustainable political solutions to such conflict situations.

The responsibility for the protection of civilians lies with the national Governments. However, in situations involving the complete breakdown of national governance structures, it is important to see how to prevent such uncontrolled conflicts.

The implementation of robust mandates is a complex task with serious inherent risks and less than certain outcomes. The clarity of mandates required for a more offensive operation is difficult to achieve. The inherent subjectivity involved in the timing of an offensive operation, in anticipation of imminent danger, can impact the perceived impartiality of the United Nations. Such operations would have to be based on unimpeachable information, which is hard to ensure. The adequacy of military assets and other resources is another crucial aspect.

Any direct offensive action against a particular group is fraught with the possibility of retaliatory attacks, a trend that is being witnessed increasingly. Protecing civilians in camps for internally displaced persons and refugees is even more complex and requires careful attention. In that context, the need for regular consultations between the Council, the troop-contributing nations and the Secretariat for improved mandate-designing and implementation has been well recognized. It needs to be pursued with the seriousness it deserves.

Conflicts are about struggle for political power. Conflict resolution and peacekeeping therefore have to be primarily a political activity. Increasingly, the focus of peacekeeping is on a robust approach and technological aspects, and often it appears to lose focus on the ultimate goal of seeking a political solution to the conflict. Therefore, not only the deployment of armed forces but other efforts of a robust political nature also need to be given due attention. Political interventions need diligence, skill and sustained diplomacy.

Peace and security issues today are vastly different from seven decades ago, when the primary concern of the Council was to prevent a recurrence of conflict between former colonial Powers. Today, the issues of peace and security cannot be seen in isolation from the wider development-related issues that are dealt with outside the Council. A more holistic approach towards gender equality and empowerment, access to health care, education, employment, and the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes are all important aspects of a holistic approach to prevent conflict.

While there seems to be general agreement about the need for greater focus on peacebuilding to prevent conflicts, as was witnessed in the identical resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council recently (resolution 70/262 and resolution 2282 (2016), respectively) , the budget allocation for peacebuilding does not even reach 1 per cent of that for peacekeeping operations.

The long-standing and ongoing contribution by India to United Nations peacekeeping, dating back six decades, is a testimony to the dedication and professionalism brought by the Indian peacekeepers to their peacekeeping duties. Half a century ago, when there was no distinct concept of the protection of civilians, an Indian army captain in the Congo was awarded India's highest award for paying the ultimate sacrifice in defence of civilians. India lost a large number of peacekeepers in a mission in 1962, the largest such loss for one country in any mission.

As the largest cumulative troop-contributor, and having participated in nearly 50 of the almost 70 peacekeeping missions mandated by the Council, India is deeply conscious of the complexities involved in the response of the international community to conflict situations. Our recent agreement to participate in the

United Nations Force Intervention Brigade in Congo has assisted in more flexible and timely interventions for the protection of civilians.

India stands ready to contribute in all possible ways to secure sustained peace and security that leads to the protection of civilians.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiolea (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico would like to thank France for having convened this open debate. We would also like to thank to the Secretary-General, the President of the Central African Republic and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their briefings.

My country acknowledges that peacekeeping operations constitute an invaluable tool for international security, and we firmly support the role of the Security Council in assigning priority on an ongoing basis to the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operation mandates. Nonetheless, we would like to reiterate the point that the efficiency of the Security Council and the United Nations in terms of protecting civilians to date presents us with mixed results. Some actions taken by the Council have been successful, but in other instances a lack of consensus among Council members have blocked early action that could have saved lives and to preserve the human dignity of civilians.

Member States are asking more and more from peacekeeping operations. For that reason, we bear a collective responsibility to equip peacekeeping operations with the tools that they require to be able to fulfil the mandates conferred upon them by the Security Council to protect civilians in armed conflict.

As the Secretary-General mentions in his most recent report (S/2016/477) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the obligation to act with strict adherence to international law, international human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law is a requirement for strengthening the protection of the civilian population.

It is also vitally important that the perspective of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local actors be taken into account in any strategic assessment of peacekeeping operations pertaining to the protection of civilians. Working in a coordinated way with peacekeeping operations, such actors can enhance the ability of peacekeeping operations to strengthen and uphold early-warning systems, mechanisms of oversight and intelligence, as well as foster a climate of trust among the most affected communities and the United Nations. In that context, we believe that an important step that has been taken is the deployment of civilian protection advisers to missions with explicit protection-of-civilian mandates, which will contribute to the drafting of protection strategies and the coordination of their implementation.

As far as Mexico is concerned, the work of women Blue Helmets fosters trust and contributes to an enhanced understanding of the essential needs of protection of local populations, thereby paving the way for more effective responses. For that reason, we would like to reiterate to encourage greater participation by women in peacekeeping operations.

We also believe it is indispensable that we uphold the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse by members of peacekeeping operations, be they civilian or military, and indeed by any authorized force authorized by the Security Council. Anyone who commits such crimes must be brought to justice. It the joint responsibility of the Secretariat and of police- and troop-contributing countries to improve predeployment training, including for staff focused on protecting civilians and on the matter of prevening sexual exploitation and abuse.

In order for there to be more precise and better implemented mandates, we reiterate the need for consultations among the Security Council, troop- and police-contributing countries and the Secretariat at every stage of a peacekeeping operation.

As pointed out by the Secretary-General, I would like to emphasize that humanitarian action and peacekeeping are important instruments to protect civilians. Nonetheless, such efforts cannot, and should not, replace political efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts.

The key role given by the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and the Secretary-General to prevention, mediation and, above all, the primacy of political solutions over military ones, have given rise to a new dimension in the peace and security pillar of the United Nations, namely, the matter of sustaining peace. That is an issue on which the Security Council adopted a historic resolution (resolution 2282 (2016)), as did the General Assembly (resolution 70/262).

The three review processes, along with the adoption of 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1) and the outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit, afford us an opportunity to redefine the United Nations architecture for the protection of civilians and to comprehensively address the underlying causes of conflict, which have a great deal to do with ensuring inclusive societies that allow for the full development of the potential of every individual.

Civilians continue to make up the majority of victims in armed conflicts. It is therefore vital to translate the commitment of the Security Council into updated and strengthened protection mechanisms, as that will give rise to a palpable shift in the situation on the ground. We must seize this moment to institutionalize a paradigm shift in our protection approach with the overall goal of forging short and medium-term responses and measures into sustainable solutions to guarantee long-term security for civilians.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Brazil.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for having organized the open debate.

(*spoke in English*)

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his leadership on this important issue, as well as President Faustin Archange Touadera and Peter Maurer of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their briefings.

Enhancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict is a topic of justifiable interest for the Security Council. Although the individual responsibility of Governments cannot be minimized, the protection of civilians is also a collective responsibility and a core obligation of the United Nations.

After our collective failure in avoiding the tragedies of Srebrenica and Rwanda, it has been often repeated that doing nothing is not an option. While sharing the moral frustration behind that notion, it is equally important to be wary of attempts to translate that legitimate perception into an inaccurate — and sometimes irresponsible — assumption that military action would be a panacea for the protection of civilians.

As stated by the Secretary-General in his latest report on the responsibility to protect, our choice does not lie "between inaction and the use of force" (*S/2015/500, para. 38*). The first 15 years of the twenty-first century have taught us that resort to military action more often than not increases the vulnerability of the very individuals whose protection is supposedly being sought.

The situation in Libya, for example, is a reminder of the consequences of ill-conceived strategies. A military intervention allegedly undertaken to implement resolution 1973 (2011) and a post-conflict scenario in which genuine peacebuilding efforts were absent resulted in the erosion of local institutions and widespread violence — both in the country and in the region — paving the way for the spread of Da'esh and forcing millions to seek refuge elsewhere.

This is not an argument against resorting to robust mandates under any circumstances. It is a statement in recognition of the importance of developing an adequate understanding of what the use of force can and cannot accomplish. Because of its unintended consequences, in particular to the civilian population, military action cannot be a first option.

Allow me to stress that this observation is not only demanded by international law, with the Charter of the United Nations at its centre; it is also evidence-based and in line with the fundamental principle of "first, do no harm". The 2000 Brahimi report (see S/2000/809) stressed how peacekeepers — troops and police — who witness violence against civilians should be presumed to be authorized to stop it, within their means, in support of basic United Nations principles. However, the report also questioned the credibility and achievability of a blanket mandate to protect civilians, acknowledging that United Nations operations can protect only a small fraction of the civilian population exposed to the potential risk of violence. Sixteen years later, the gap between expectations and resources available remains one of the key issues echoed by the United Nations peace operations review. In the same vein, former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his report entitled "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005), suggested that a list of proposed criteria, including the seriousness of the threat, proportionality and the chance of success, be applied for the authorization of the use of force in general.

It is clear that United Nations peacekeeping operations are not designed or equipped to impose political solutions through the sustained use of force. When the use of force is contemplated and duly authorized, action must be judicious, proportionate and strictly limited to the objectives of the agreed mandate. Furthermore, the international community has a right to expect full accountability from those to whom authority is granted by the United Nations to resort to force. These are all notions for which Brazil has been consistently advocating. At the same time, there are numerous non-military tools available for the protection of civilians, including strong political advocacy, credible reporting and liaison with communities. There are also several modalities of support for national authorities.

When it comes to protecting civilians in situations of conflict, Brazil fully supports a people-centred approach, including through engagement with local actors and those affected by conflict, as underlined by the High-level Panel on Peace Operations and by the Secretary-General. That is essential for peace to be sustainable, as those on the receiving end need to lead the way to recovery and peace.

It can also improve proper conflict monitoring and local ownership of protection mechanisms, thereby building a protective environment through the important role of unarmed-civilian-protection strategies. Protecting 200,000 civilians for several months and providing adequate humanitarian assistance to avert disease has been a significant achievement of the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan and humanitarian actors in South Sudan, for example.

Nonetheless, compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law has to be further enhanced, as recently stressed by many during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. The spectrum of concrete measures could include the training of States' armed forces, ratifying core international treaties, advocating their universalization, and education and awareness-raising. It is also crucial to enhance the protection of women and girls against sexual violence and improve monitoring and reporting of violations.

The denial of humanitarian access deprives people of human dignity. Unfettered humanitarian access is imperative, and more systematic approaches to responding to access constraints are essential. Brazil welcomes the Secretary-General's decision to deploy senior protection-of-civilians advisers in all missions with explicit protection mandates, with a direct reporting line to the Head of Mission, to advise on the development of strategies and coordinate implementation.

The principles of peacekeeping operations did not come into existence by chance; they aim to preserve space for dialogue and diplomatic activity. We wish to express a word of caution regarding certain flexible understandings of the use of force by peacekeeping operations, as defended by a few. Rather than pointing towards more effective protection for civilians, such flexibility can be counterproductive and compromise the credibility of the United Nations. It is conceivable that, in very specific circumstances, a preparedness to use force to protect civilians will enhance the standing of the United Nations. But such understandings must be the outcome of careful, inclusive and multilateral deliberation.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the fact that the Brazilian troops and police officers currently deployed in 10 United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions have been, and will continue to be, trained and equipped to be able to deliver on their responsibility to protect civilians. Since 2004, Brazilian troops and force commanders of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti have played a decisive role in reducing violence and building a safer environment in critical areas of Port-au-Prince, such as Cité Soleil. In September 2015, the Brazilian vessel en route to lead the Maritime Task Force of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon rescued 220 refugees adrift in the Mediterranean Sea. These examples demonstrate that Brazil stands ready to continue to contribute to alleviating the suffering of civilians affected by conflict, according to the relevant peacekeeping mandates, in full respect of the Charter of the United Nations and established peacekeeping principles.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Sandoval Cojulún (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Guatemala welcomes the convening of today's open debate and aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Guatemala thanks France for the concept note that was circulated in preparation for this open debate

(S/2016/503, annex) and agrees with its contents, namely, that 2016 should be a year of opportunity for Member States to evaluate United Nations efforts and the contribution of peacekeeping operations towards protecting civilians, while identifying ways forward and improving its work in this area.

We recognize that the protection of civilians is an integral part of several peacekeeping operations mandates. However, it is important to understand that such protection remains primarily the responsibility of the receiving State. In that regard, peacekeeping operations with a mandate to protect civilians should not assume the role and responsibilities of the host Government, but act in support of its efforts, that is, work together with the country concerned.

From our perspective as a troop-contributing country, the use of force must always be the last resort, especially when acting on behalf of the United Nations. While we fully understand the reasons for which mandates calling for more robust peacekeeping operations have been developed, especially when the protection of civilians is at stake, it is our opinion that forceful action undertaken under the banner of the United Nations should be carefully considered by the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, which is the forum to negotiate everything related to peacekeeping operations.

It is of grave concern to Guatemala that there are persistent problems in peacekeeping operations in terms of sexual exploitation and abuse committed against the civilian population. Such acts tarnish the reputation of all staff of the Organization and should not be tolerated. Guatemala reiterates its call, which it has made at various times, for improving the effectiveness with which the Secretariat follows up with Member States on the disciplinary or legal measures adopted for these purposes, be it for civilian or military personnel. In that regard, we believe that timely, comprehensive investigations are essential in responding to any incident that might constitute criminal conduct. It is important to strengthen the rapid response capacity in order to respond quickly and effectively to all complaints with impartiality. We understand that this should apply throughout the United Nations system.

Guatemala highlights the Council's need to strengthen implementation of the zero-tolerance policy regarding sexual abuse or exploitation in the context of the various mandates of peacekeeping missions. We emphasize the importance of integrating such missions with the United Nations system as a whole, with full respect for the human rights of civilians as a priority. At the same time, we urge improved communication with regard to the situation on the ground and administrative decision-making, in order to prevent the recurrence of any incidents such as those that took place in the Central African Republic.

We emphasize the need to improve and strengthen triangular cooperation among the Security Council, the Secretariat and the troop- and police-contributing countries in the decision-making process and implementation of mandates, with a view to strengthening the protection of civilians on the ground.

Finally, Guatemala has carefully studied the various initiatives that have been developed aimed at the protection of civilians and mandated under peacekeeping operations, such as the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. While the latter is a positive initiative, we believe it is important that they be discussed in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations in order to promote transparency, and included in discussions among all the States Member of the Organization, especially the troop-contributing countries.

While States have the primary responsibility to protect their civilians, the international community and the Council have an obligation to prevent atrocities committed in the context of peacekeeping operations. In that regard, we welcome initiatives such as the Security Council code of conduct on limiting the use of the veto, proposed jointy by Mexico and France.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Mr. Morales López (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the French delegation for organizing this important debate and the guiding concept note (S/2016/503, annex). We also welcome the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France in the debate, as well as the briefings to the Security Council by the Secretary-General, the President of the Central African Republic and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Colombia recognizes the importance of this forum for discussion, which facilitates assessment of the efforts of peacekeeping operations in the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict.

While it may seem paradoxical, peacekeeping operations are successful precisely when they are no longer necessary, as they lay the foundation for lasting peace and empower national authorities, while coordinating efforts to fulfil protection-of-civilians mandates.

We share the concern about the situation facing civilians in armed conflict in some parts of the world, and the ongoing violations by the parties to conflict of their obligations to respect and protect civilians in accordance with international law, and beyond that, as a natural obligation of humankind.

We agree that respect for international law on the part of all parties to a conflict is a condition without which protecting civilians and guaranteeing access to humanitarian assistance will not be possible. Likewise, the application of due and timely justice to the crimes committed is also crucial. Colombia supports the role of peacekeeping operations in that task and believes that their effectiveness requires coordinated efforts by the United Nations with national authorities, based on strategic policies, commitment and adherence to international law by the parties to the conflict, as well as clear mandates and the Organization's exemplary work in the field.

Effectively carrying out protection-of-civilians mandates must be strengthened by way of States' political will and fulfilment of their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We emphasize that protecting civilians is the responsibility of the State, which is something that should be clear when implementing peacekeeping mandates, that include such tasks. In that regard, the United Nations must continue efforts in support of national authorities' implementation of the responsibility to protect civilians and in promoting compliance on the part of non-State armed groups, with international humanitarian law.

My Government highlights the role of various accountability mechanisms in strengthening the protection of civilians during armed conflict. Likewise, we emphasize the importance of negotiations between the conflicting parties to encourage the demobilization and reintegration of armed non-State actors into civilian life, as a strategy in the long-term rebuilding of the country.

Colombia seeks peace and reconciliation through justice, victim compensation, the restoration of trust and guarantees of non-recurrence.

My country has taken note of the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/447) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and of its recommendations. My delegation would also like to reiterate the importance of United Nations entities being fully familiar with the work of national Governments in the area of protection of civilians when prioritizing their efforts and informing the Organization on the respective situations. Verified, objective, balanced and impartial information includes identifying gaps and challenges, as well as recognition of the progress in each country.

My Government shares the concern about the difficulties impeding humanitarian access and believes that international assistance in that area should adhere to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, as enshrined in resolution 46/182 of the General Assembly.

Finally, I recall that three recent reports on United Nations peace operations (see S/2015/446), the review of the peacebuilding architecture (see S/2015/490) and the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, emphasize the importance of seeking solutions to prevent conflicts. That is why my country reiterates the need to protect civilians before the start of a crisis and meet the needs of the population. A prevention perspective is the best way to protect and prevent peoples' suffering.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Lauber (Switzerland): I am pleased to take the floor on behalf of members of the Group of Friends of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, namely, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Uruguay and my own country, Switzerland. The Group of Friends thanks the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate and for keeping protection of civilians high on the agenda. We also thank today's briefers for their statements.

It is right that the protection of civilians be discussed by the Security Council on a regular basis, to reaffirm the necessity for full respect and implementation of the norms and principles related to the protection of civilians as enshrined in international human rights law, human rights and refugee law and in international criminal law. Parties to armed conflict must be reminded time and again that even wars have rules, and that those rules apply to all.

We continue to call on the Security Council to systematically uphold core protection-of-civilians standards. The latest report (S/2016/447) of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians clearly indicates that the situation is worsening in a number of areas. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians are widespread in many contemporary conflicts. Schools and medical personnel and facilities are regularly and increasingly targeted. Access restrictions on humanitarian workers impede the delivery of assistance. A growing number of parties to armed conflict openly disregard long-established rules of international humanitarian law, especially with regard to the conduct of hostilities or of persons no longer participating in hostilities. In that context, the unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) by the Council, on health care in armed conflict and the protection of medical personnel and facilities — an adoption with a large number of sponsors — sends an important signal. Despite the numerous violations observed in recent years, international law is clear: the wounded and the sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities, must be respected and protected.

At the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, States, civil society and humanitarian leaders consistently asserted that international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law are more relevant than ever. Global leaders announced significant commitments to enhance compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law through a spectrum of concrete measures.

Turning to peacekeeping operations, we want to stress that protecting the civilian population and persons who are no longer taking part in hostilities is not just another task of the United Nations; it is seen by many as the essence of the United Nations. The implementation of the recommendations emanating from the peace operations review presents a key opportunity; the review highlights the tools we need to enable United Nations peacekeeping missions to leverage all their components to effectively protect civilians. Such a mission-wide task requires a solid foundation in the form of clear and pragmatic mandates that reflect what is feasible on the ground. A whole-of-mission approach to the protection of civilians is essential. Mission leadership can play an essential role, and the civilian and police components of missions can contribute to protecting civilians just as much as the military components, depending on the situation.

Political engagement and support for political settlements should be seen as an integral part of this effort. The best way to protect civilians is by preventing armed conflict in the first instance and, if this fails, by ending armed conflicts through a negotiated and inclusive settlement. We also believe that establishing accountability is essential to making progress on protection issues and in this regard welcome the fact that missions such as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic are tasked with supporting the fight against impunity and the work of the International Criminal Court.

We further believe that tailored mission planning is crucial for the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. In this context, we see great potential for a phased mandating process that ensures a sound alignment between the needs on the ground and available resources. We also need a systematic review of mandates after an initial period, in close consultation with troop- and police-contributing countries.

We see benefits in mandates that give clear guidelines on the distribution of tasks. In this context, we welcome the establishment of senior protection-of-civilians advisers and comprehensive protection-of-civilians strategies in all missions with such a mandate. Such approaches pave the way for close cooperation with all actors involved and for the further development of best practices and approaches that are tailor-made to specific contexts. Enhanced conflict analysis is also necessary for mission planning, and we welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to revise existing conflict-analysis methodologies and to set up a centralized analysis and planning capacity in the Secretary-General's Office. Furthermore, protection of civilians must be an integral part of the pre-deployment training for both uniformed and civilian personnel.

A coherent approach across the United Nations system is fundamental for efficient cooperation between the United Nations and local actors, non-governmental organizations and regional and other international organizations. Let us also not forget that there are pressing protection challenges in several conflicts, including situations on the Council's agenda, where there are currently no peacekeeping operations, and that these also have to be addressed. A gender perspective is a key component of effective protection. Field-based United Nations missions must reach out to women and girls not only to ensure that their specific needs are taken into account but also to realize their full potential and engage them as protectors.

The Group of Friends also takes note of the Kigali Principles on the protection of civilians currently endorsed by 30 countries aiming at reinforcing the protection of civilians by troop- and police-contributing countries in the framework of peacekeeping operations.

Finally, missions can succeed only if both uniformed and civilian personnel act in the spirit of the mandate as well as of the overarching goals of the United Nations. Repeated incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations representatives in peacekeeping missions have painfully reminded us how devastating the actions of a few individuals can be for an entire organization and in particular for the lives of those whom they should be protecting.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for your initiative to convene this timely debate on such an important issue.

The protection of civilians has over the years justifiably assumed more importance in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations because of increasingly challenging environments. Sustainable peace is hardly possible when local populations are at risk of violence. When civilians are vulnerable, governance, security and the rule of law all flounder, and the United Nations is unable to fulfil a fundamental precept of its Charter, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".

United Nations peacekeeping mandates have evolved over the past two decades. From the traditional role of monitoring the implementation of peace agreements, modern peacekeeping has become multidimensional, addressing the full spectrum of activities, from providing secure environments to protecting civilians and rebuilding the capacities of States.

The primary responsibility for the protection of all civilians, without discrimination, lies with the host country. Peacekeepers support the host Governments in carrying out this responsibility. The creation of the Force Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, was designed as a short-term measure to allow local forces to fully develop their capabilities and assume their responsibilities.

The protection-of-civilian mandates have traditionally been implemented by our peacekeepers while adhering to the principles of peacekeeping. It is a mistaken notion that these principles are somehow incompatible with protecting civilians. The edifice of peacekeeping is based on these principles, and they continue to be the bedrock on which it rests. The Security Council establishes protection-of-civilians mandates, and the use of force in defence of the mandate is an integral and ineluctable part of those principles.

While robust mandates are at times necessitated by the situation on the ground, they also pose practical implementation challenges. Questions raised 15 years ago by the Brahimi report about the credibility and achievability of a blanket mandate to protect civilians still await convincing answers. Consultations with troop-contributing countries at the time of formulation of such mandates are certainly necessary for better implementation.

The conduct of peacekeeping operations needs to be driven by the unique requirements of each mission, not by any political or financial consideration. We need to collectively ensure that any given peacekeeping mission is provided adequate financial and other necessary resources along with political support to accomplish its assigned tasks.

My delegation also believes that the participation of women in peacekeeping operations helps to make them not just more people-centred but also more effective in implementing protection-of-civilians mandates.

An issue that needs greater attention is the fact that protection of civilians is primarily interpreted in military terms: the provision of tangible protection under imminent threat. Its scope should include protection through political action as well as institution- and capacity-building. The use of non-military tools such as advocacy, liaison with local communities and building the capacity of national authorities also help to achieve the same objective.

Pakistan, as one of the world's top troop-contributing countries, has proudly and conscientiously undertaken the task of proactively protecting civilians when mandated by the Council, including in current missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur, Côte d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic and Liberia. We have demonstrated that this can be done by a robust deterrence posture and without resorting to the actual use of force, as in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur recently.

In similar situations in the past, the decisive action of our peacekeepers in Cambodia, for example, helped the consolidation of peace in the early 1990s. In Bosnia in the mid-1990s, our troops defended the United Nations safe area and its ethnically mixed civilian population against repeated onslaughts of ethnic-cleansing militias. Then, in 2003 and 2004 in Sierra Leone, an unsteady United Nations presence was transformed into a major United Nations success story, primarily as a result of the participation of Pakistani peacekeepers. In one district of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistani troops provided security to thousands of civilians exposed to brutal ethnic violence.

The protection of civilians is a system-wide responsibility, with the host country in the lead. But it is best promoted by preventing the outbreak of armed conflicts in the first place, addressing the root causes of conflicts, finding inclusive political solutions to disputes and seeking peaceful the settlement of conflicts. Political solutions must be placed front and centre of peacekeeping operations, for that is the only viable path to achieving sustainable and enduring peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I thank France for having organized this important open debate under its presidency of the Security Council. The presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development of France and other Ministers reflects the importance of the subject we are discussing today. We listened with great interest to the introductory briefings of the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as to the statement made by the President of the Central African Republic.

Luxembourg fully supports the European Union statement, as well as that made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians. Let me point out some matters of particular importance to us at the national level.

It is glaringly obvious to us that civilians are the main victims of armed conflicts. They are paying the heaviest price in human lives, be it in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan or the Central African Republic. Civilians are increasingly targeted and tortured in order to terrorize, force mass displacements or inflict a moral defeat on an enemy that cannot be overcome on the battlefield. One corollary to this fact is the absolute need for the Security Council to demonstrate determination and consistency when it comes to ensuring respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians.

The protection of civilians must not be just a rhetorical priority confined to debates and thematic resolutions. Since the early 2000s, the Council has endowed itself with a normative framework and ambitious mandates in particular with respect to the most vulnerable groups — children and women — by developing its children and armed conflict agenda and its women and peace and security agenda. It is important to implement these with rigour and without exceptions or restrictions.

To that end, the majority of the peacekeeping operations deploy specialist advisers — women's protection advisers and child protection advisers. We are convinced that these advisers, whose usefulness has been tried and tested, should continue to exercise the specific role for which they are mandated by the Security Council. Their essential tasks include gathering trustworthy information on the situation of civilians and the risks they face.

In the area of peacekeeping operations, trust and credibility are essential. For that reason, United Nations personnel, whether civilian or military, must be irreproachable. We support the policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse, and we welcome the Secretary-General's decision to exclude from peacekeeping operations national forces listed in the annexes of his reports.

To show our commitment, Luxembourg has decided to make a voluntary contribution of €135,000, or about $150,000, to support the work of the Special Coordinator on Improving United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, Ms. Jane Holl Lute, and her team. We hope that this support will bear fruit and help to prevent these heinous crimes and assist the victims Among the priorities for action, we consider it essential to ensure that peacekeepers and United

Nations personnel in general receive adequate training before deployment.

Finally, I would like to conclude my statement by focusing on prevention. No conflict erupts without warning signs. These signs can be manifold, but they generally include the intensification of violations of human rights. We therefore fully support the initiative of the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative, and we encourage him to pursue its implementation.

Our organization was created to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. The protection of civilians must be at the heart of our action. We cannot afford to fail.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): The Secretary-General's May report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2016/447)is a grim illustration of the huge number of civilians whose lives are being devastated by conflict. Protecting civilians is the primary responsibility of Governments, a fundamental principle of international humanitarian law, and a core obligation of United Nations peace operations.

The credibility and legitimacy of United Nations peacekeepers largely depend on their willingness and capability to act when civilians are under threat. Despite significant growth in norms and frameworks for the protection of civilians, performance across United Nations peacekeeping operations remains mixed. The implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations provide an important opportunity to embed the protection of civilians at the centre of peacekeeping. The Panel highlights that protection mandates are a mission-wide task involving military, police and civilian personnel and utilizing every tool at their disposal.

First, significant progress is being made in delivering this critical objective. Australia welcomes the renewed efforts of States to support the unprecedented demands facing United Nations peacekeeping. Implementing the substantial pledges made at the 2014 and 2015 peacekeeping summits will be vital to ensuring that capabilities and resources match mandates. Australia, for its part, has pledged strategic airlift support, training for regional peacekeepers and funding to build capacity to counter improvised explosive devices.

Secondly, we support implementing whole-of-mission protection of civilians strategies and best practices. For example, we welcome the deployment of senior protection of civilian advisers in all missions, and we encourage the creation of community alert networks to deepen our understanding of threats and how to reduce risk. We also recognize that the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians provide a useful set of principles to guide troop- and police-contributing countries. The principles emphasize the importance of personnel being appropriately trained, equipped and tasked to protect civilians.

Thirdly, accountability is crucial to improving the protection of civilians by peacekeeping operations. We therefore welcome the trial of a new compact between the United Nations and the Central African Republic, strengthening accountability for civilian protection. We also support the implementation of new indicators to assess the effectiveness of protection mandates and evaluate performance. Central to that is mission reporting on obstacles to fulfilling protection mandates, including the failure of peacekeepers to act or follow orders.

Finally, it is hard to imagine a more shocking contradiction to the intent of protecting civilians than sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers of the very people they have been sent to protect. We therefore commend the Security Council for taking strong action to ensure accountability foe sexual exploitation and abuse through resolution 2272 (2016), in particular the authorization to repatriate military or police units that fail to hold perpetrators to account.

In conclusion, there can be no doubt that protecting civilians is a challenging and complex endeavour, but it is the measure by which United Nations peacekeeping is judged, and it demands our sustained attention and commitment.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Ms. Frankinet (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): As you requested, Mr. President, I will deliver a condensed version of my statement.

Belgium fully associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union, as well as with the statement delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians. The situation of civilians in armed conflict has deteriorated seriously. Indiscriminate attacks and attacks directly targeting civilians are on the rise. Schools and hospitals are being bombed, and access to food and water is being deliberately restricted.

A growing number of parties to armed conflicts choose to ignore the most basic rules of international humanitarian law. That trend is particularly visible in Syria, where parties to the conflict continue to hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We call on the parties to the conflict in Syria to ensure humanitarian access to the civilian population. In that connection, we recall the recent adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), co-sponsored by Belgium. We reiterate our call on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, and, of course, we must, at the same time, continue efforts to find a political solution to the crisis.

With regard to the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations, I would like to touch on three points: the mandates of peacekeeping operations, the fight against impunity and political preparation.

Regarding the mandate of peacekeeping operations, many challenges persist in terms of the effective implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates in peacekeeping operations. Such a large and complex task requires the full engagement of the troop- and police-contributing countries, as well as careful planning. Missions should be able to rely on precise, clear, coherent and realistic mandates that are adapted to the needs of the field.

The protection of civilians cannot be treated as a static given; rather, it requires a tailored approach. Priority must be given to the protection of civilians in the mandates of peacekeeping operations; a phased approach should be used, accompanied by greater coherence across the United Nations system on the ground. We welcome the decision of the Secretary-General with regard to the deployment in peacekeeping operations of senior advisers responsible for developing a comprehensive strategy for the protection of civilians. The effective implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates rests on the establishment of strategies that take advantage of all available tools and that take into account the fact that, ultimately, the protection of civilians can be guaranteed in a sustainable manner only by political solutions.

I take this opportunity to touch upon the revised mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), in which the protection of civilians is a central priority. Action by MONUSCO must be extend not only to areas in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where violence is rampant, but also to cover the security risks that may accompany the electoral process. We look forward to taking note of the measures taken or proposed by MONUSCO in that context in the next report of the Secretary-General.

Secondly, there is the fight against impunity. Those responsible for the most serious crimes cannot remain unpunished. Peacekeeping operations should be equipped with the capacity and expertise to provide, in a professional manner, the desired support for the procedures initiated by national or international jurisdictions. Here, we welcome the efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic to establish a special criminal court, supported by a joint arrangement between the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the United Nations Development Programme.

The fact that the Security Council has, at the request of the Central African authorities, mandated MINUSCA to support the operation of the special criminal court, particularly in its operational activities, seems to us to be a very positive element. Similarly, we welcome the fact that the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) includes support for the efforts of the Malian authorities, which, in 2012, referred the violations there to the International Criminal Court. The United Nations and Member States must also act decisively against crimes committed by peacekeepers or mission staff against civilians, for whose protection they are responsible. In that regard, we welcome the policy of zero tolerance with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse, which was set by the Secretary-General.

Thirdly, there is political preparation. I would like to make three brief comments in that connection. First, the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which Belgium has recently endorsed and pursuant to which Member States undertake to fully implement protection-of-civilians mandates, represent an important step in the right direction. Secondly, we must do more to ensure that all staff members of peacekeeping operations are better prepared to protect civilians. Belgium will shortly assume leadership of the European mission in Mali for the training of Malian troops, starting this summer, in close cooperation with MINUSMA, in order for those troops to also be able to assume, in a sustainable manner, their responsibility to protect civilians.

Finally, the best protection for civilians is, of course, prevention. The Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative makes a significant contribution in that regard. Here, we also wish to acknowledge the positive role played by the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, who, from the beginning of the crisis in the Central African Republic, has alerted the Security Council to the grave violations of human rights and the cycle of violence that has been unleashed. In the context of prevention and the Security Council's response, we thank France for the efforts it has made and for the leadership demonstrated through its initiative on restraining the use of the veto.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): Poland aligns itself with the statement to be delivered soon by the observer of the European Union. I would like, however, to present a few remarks from our national perspective.

I would first like to thank the French presidency for giving us the opportunity to discuss the recent developments in the field of the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Poland greatly values the contribution of France to United Nations peacekeeping operations, as well as France's engagement in the field of conflict prevention. I would also like to reiterate my country's support of the French initiative to limit the use of the veto in cases involving mass atrocities. We perceive that initiative as an important contribution to efforts to protect civilians worldwide. We call upon all permanent members of the Council to support that initiative.

As underlined in the excellent concept paper prepared for this debate by France (S/2016/503, annex), the role of the Security Council in the protection of civilians is crucial and second only to the responsibility to protect borne by States. We welcome the Council's recognition of that obligation, confirmed by the introduction of a protection of civilians clause in the mandates of ten out of sixteen current peacekeeping missions. That is a first step towards ensuring that the missions are equipped with the tools needed to effectively protect the innocent victims of armed conflicts.

The second step requires that more attention be given to the protection of civilians in the process of the drafting of Security Council resolutions. Peacekeeping missions' mandates should be tailor-made, and the resources allocated should match the challenges in the field. Mandates should be reviewed whenever the need arises, based on an assessment of the situation on the ground. That requires close cooperation with the troop- and police-contributing countries and the Secretariat, as well as with the Special Committee of Peacekeeping Operations in the phase of mandate implementation.

Another area that requires greater attention is the peacekeepers' training process, which has to equip the Blue Helmets with a clear vision of the mission's priorities and the general aim of protecting the most vulnerable. This is why Poland decided to sign the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. We call upon all troop- and police-contributing countries to endorse it. We also call for strict implementation of the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse committed by peacekeeping personnel.

We should also bear in mind that United Nations peacekeepers do not act in a vacuum. On the contrary, they are deployed within living communities and troubled societies. To even stand a chance at protecting endangered civilians, they need strong partnerships with local and regional actors present in the field. Those partnerships are in many cases the key to effective implementation of the mission's mandate.

As many of us argued during the high-level thematic debate of the General Assembly on the United Nations, peace and security in May, the time has come to take a more people-centred approach in our efforts undertaken in the areas of conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. We hope that our conclusions from the major reviews in the field of peace and security will be implemented shortly and we call on the Security Council to actively join this collective effort of the United Nations community.

In closing, let me recall the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, which rightly pointed out that the principles of peacekeeping "should never be an excuse for failure to protect civilians or to defend the mission proactively" (*S/2015/446, p. 12*). As an international community, we have heard too many excuses for non-action. To change it, we need to start here — in the Security Council — and make sure that peacekeepers are well prepared to bring safety and protection to civilians who need it most.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Cardi (Italy) (*spoke in French*): Italy thanks France for organizing this open debate, which, together with the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/447), leads us to reflect on the role of peacekeeping operations from the perspective of the protection of civilians. I thank the Secretary-General, the President of the Central African Republic and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their presentations.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union, and that delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians. I would like to make the following additional comments in my national capacity.

(*spoke in English*)

Significant progress has already been achieved, including the Safe School Declaration, endorsed by Italy; the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2015/23, reaffirming the Council's commitment to this cause; the commitments agreed at the recent World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul; and the unanimous adoption with a large number of co-sponsors, including Italy, of resolution 2286 (2016) on health care in armed conflict and the protection of medical personnel and facilities. But more, of course, can be done, while recognizing the importance of traditional principles: the primary responsibility of the State, impartiality, consent and the non-use of force.

Italy is among the inaugural subscribers of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, establishing that effective protection of civilians requires properly trained troops, adequate equipment and strong political commitment. We are confident that a greater number of troop- and police-contributing countries will subscribe to these principles and, especially, implement them. Their mention in the final report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations is a significant first step. Italy also supports the ACT code of conduct and the French/Mexican initiative on veto restraint.

As the top troop-contributing country of the Group of Western European and Other States, Italy believes that the effective protection of civilians requires clear, sequenced and prioritized mandates, properly trained troops, adequate equipment and a reinforced role of regional organizations. I would like to underline six concrete points of action.

The first is that appropriate training is key and Italy will continue to do its part, redoubling efforts in training and capacity-building for peace and justice operators. Since 2005, through the Centre of Excellence for the Stability of Police Units in Vicenza, we have trained more than 9,000 units for police personnel, many of whom are deployed in operations in Africa. The protection of civilian lies at the very heart of our training.

Secondly, our training includes courses on the protection and promotion of human rights and international humanitarian law and on sexual and gender-based violence and includes individual programmes on appropriate conduct and local customs, while ensuring the firmest stance against abuses. We believe that the zero-tolerance policy must be met with tailored training to reach a zero-case reality and protect the credibility and trust of the missions. In this area, accountability should be strengthened, appropriate domestic prosecution must take place and the United Nations should encourage States to cooperate.

Thirdly, due consideration must be given to the need to properly equip missions, also by adopting available technological solutions, such as the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, which have proved on many occasions to be key in saving civilian lives.

Fourthly, strengthening the gender perspective of peace operations is key to effective protection and can be achieved both by increasing the overall number of women serving in peace operations and — during the mission — by reaching out to women and girls in local communities, engaging them as actors of peace and prevention.

Fifthly, in line with our overall view that regional and subregional organizations are ideally placed to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, we will continue to work to strengthen the relation between the United Nations and regional organizations, especially the African Union, to reinforce their capability in dealing with crises.

My sixth and final point is on prevention. It is the right choice and the smart choice and the best way to guarantee an effective protection of civilians. I stress the importance of early warning mechanisms, such as the framework of analyses for atrocity crimes and the Human Rights Up Front initiative.

(*spoke in French*)

In conclusion, in the corridors of the United Nations, we often hear about the "Italian path to peace". This path brings together tradition, innovation and training, and above all, always places people and communities at the centre of the mission's action. This is the path we are committed to supporting.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vrailas (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer; the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake; and the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin Archange Touadera, for their briefings.

(*spoke in English*)

The protection of civilians in armed conflicts remains an acute and urgent concern for the EU and its member States. We concur with the Secretary-General, as expressed in his report of June 2015 (see S/2015/453), that prevailing disrespect for international humanitarian law by some States and non-State armed groups and pervasive impunity for violations have become one of the most critical challenges for the protection of civilians. Upholding the norms that safeguard humankind was at the heart of the recent World Humanitarian Summit and we must take forward the commitments that were made there to enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The specific protection needs of women and children require special attention. Similar attention should also be paid to the phenomenon of sexual violence and the use of rape as tactics of warfare, affecting women, children, but also men. Children are disproportionately affected by armed conflict, and grave violations against children continue to increase. The situation of children in many places, such as Syria, the Central African Republic and Mali, among others, is of most urgent concern.

National authorities have the primary responsibility to provide protection for their citizens. However, the protection of civilians is also a main task of peacekeeping and is often decisive for the success and legitimacy of United Nations peacekeeping operations. Today, 10 out of 16 peacekeeping missions have mandates encompassing the protection of civilians.

However, many challenges remain in terms of the effective implementation of protection mandates, and we need to continue to address them. For example, effective implementation requires better planning support to missions, capturing lessons learned effectively and improving the understanding of how to support host States in protecting civilians. Missions need to be equipped with the tools to address both the root causes of crises and their most visible consequences. Peacekeepers must protect civilians under threat of physical violence consistent with the requirements of their mandates. Different levels of threat must be met with the appropriate and commensurate use of force, as necessary.

Clearly, local actors and non-governmental organizations, as well as regional and international organizations, have a key role to play in supporting national authorities in their protection-of-civilians responsibilities. Key areas to advance in the protection of civilians, such as a political process, conflict prevention, early warning and partnerships, which were all emphasized in the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) and the Secretary-General's reports, would require the active involvement of all those actors. The EU and its members States are providing support and capacity-building to partners in all those areas. Local ownership is an important factor in protecting civilians. Regional and subregional organizations play an increasingly important role in international peace and security. Better coordination of efforts between the United Nations and such organizations should be pursued to ensure that the distribution of objectives and tasks among organizations maximizes the impact on the ground.

Peacekeeping operations need to be equipped with clear, coherent, concise and achievable mandates that include a strong human rights component when relevant, and protection mandates must be translated into solid concepts of operations and operational guidelines. We call on all peacekeeping operations with a protection-of-civilians mandate to put in place protection-of-civilians strategies by the end of this year. Transition arrangements between different operations or distinct organizations and exit strategies should be explored early on. From an early stage onwards, transition arrangements should take into account elements that will contribute to the assessment of the overall efficiency of the missions once they are terminated.

We agree that, in many ways, training is the cornerstone of improving the carrying out the protection of civilians by missions. We need to improve cooperation in the area of training in order to better implement relevant United Nations standards, ideally by offering United Nations-certified training on the protection of civilians, as some EU member States have been doing. Such training should also include predeployment and in-mission training on child protection, as well as issues on sexual exploitation and abuse. The EU supports the United Nations zero-tolerance policy in that regard. There is nothing more damning for the legitimacy of international peacekeeping and for efforts to regain the trust of local populations than peacekeepers abusing those they are mandated to protect. The EU has, for its part, provided training on the protection of civilians, atrocity prevention, gender, child protection, human rights law and international humanitarian law as an integral part of the training curricula to its missions in Somalia, Mali and the Niger.

United Nations peace operations should also play a critical role in assisting the host States in the implementation of the responsibility to protect, as they are often in the front line when a State is unable or unwilling to protect civilians from the risk of atrocity crimes. In that context, United Nations peace operations need to be staffed and equipped in a way that allows United Nations personnel to better interact with the local population and civil society organizations, including women's rights-based groups, with the overarching aim of responding to warning signals and reducing the risk of atrocity crimes. The implementation of the Human Rights Up Front Initiative should make a positive contribution in that regard.

In cases where international efforts fail and atrocity crimes are committed, accountability is crucial. Where mandated or when the host State has consented thereto, United Nations peace operations should be equipped and staffed with the capability and expertise to assist in transparent investigations and support the collection of evidence in a professional manner. The EU is committed to assisting States in strengthening their national judicial and correctional systems in order to enable them to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of atrocity crimes. Furthermore, closer cooperation between the International Criminal Court (ICC) and missions in the field is of vital importance. When a peace operation is to be deployed in an ICC-situation country, its mandate should authorize it to facilitate or assist the ICC, including by assisting authorities in the protection of witnesses and the arrest and surrender of individuals subject to arrest warrants issued by the Court.

The EU finds it deeply disturbing that civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in today's armed conflicts. The Council can count on our support for reinforcing the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including through support to United Nations peace operations and through our own missions. We will continue our support for the promotion of compliance with international humanitarian law and strengthened accountability for serious violations thereof.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): Georgia aligns itself with the statement just made by the observer of the European Union delegation. In my national capacity, I would like to add the following.

First, let me express my gratitude to the French presidency, in particular to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development, for convening this debate and presiding over it at the beginning. I also thank the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their valuable contributions. I would like to extend our special thanks to the President of the Central African Republic for his insightful comments and to congratulate him and the people of the Central African Republic on their remarkable progress towards achieving sustaining peace and functioning State institutions.

Unfortunately, the most flagrant violations of human rights occur in the circumstances surrounding armed conflict, wherein innocent civilian populations, especially women and children, constitute the overwhelming majority of victims. Today the urgency of the situation is further exacerbated by unabated international terrorism and violent extremism, tragic developments in the Middle East and unresolved conflicts in many other regions throughout the globe, including my own. We believe in the centrality of the protection of civilians in all United Nations peacekeeping mandates. The safety of the population must be viewed as a critical component for stability, security and sustainable peace.

Throughout the decades, the Security Council has been addressing the issue of the protection of civilians through its statements, resolutions and various peacekeeping operations. As peacekeeping missions have grown in numbers, size and scope, the United Nations has made increasingly concerted efforts to put civilian protection at the heart of those operations. Nevertheless, with rapidly changing circumstances throughout the world, renewed efforts are urgently needed for peacekeeping to become more efficient in terms of its humanitarian and human rights dimensions, which means protecting civilians first.

While the Security Council has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, including through the establishment of peacekeeping operations, in recent years we have experienced several unfortunate cases when the Council has failed to exercise its mandate to ensure the effective and efficient protection of the civilian population. In that regard, we once again welcome and fully support the French proposal on the suspension of the veto power in cases of mass atrocities. In 2014 Georgia also joined the supporters of the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, initiated by Liechtenstein.

Georgia experienced the unfortunate termination of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia, which played a crucial role in maintaining peace and stability in Abkhazia, Georgia by the single-handed veto of a Security Council member in the spring of 2009. That irresponsible action created a dangerous precedent in United Nations peacekeeping. Since then, no adequate replacement for the dismantled international presence has been created in Georgia. While the European Union Monitoring Mission continues its duties, the tireless efforts to seek an independent, neutral and effective international presence on the ground for the purpose of peacekeeping has proved to be unsuccessful so far.

Against that background, the civilian population residing in the occupied Georgian territories are deprived of minimal safeguards for their safety and are stripped of their fundamental rights and freedom. The recent brutal murder of Giga Otkhozoria, a Georgian internally displaced person from the occupied Abkhazia region, who was shot dead while crossing the occupation line, is a sobering reminder of the seriousness of the situation. It also underlines the necessity of establishing international security and human rights monitoring mechanisms on the ground. A permanent fear for one's life, the installation of barbed-wire fences in the middle of yards and farmland, illegal detentions, restrictions on the freedom of movement and the prohibition of education in one's native language — all of those illegal, illegitimate and arbitrary actions constitute the dire reality of life in the occupied Georgian territories.

Based on our own experience, we believe that peacekeeping operations should not be staffed predominantly by representatives of any one single State, and never by the military of a State that is a party to the conflict, or is heavily involved in the particular conflict. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Peacekeeping Force, which served as the security component for the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia on the ground, clearly lacked the trust and confidence of Georgians in the area, as it was staffed exclusively by Russian military personnel. On many occasions, they triggered, or were directly involved in, grave violations of the peace arrangements, including severe human rights abuses against the local Georgian population and other incidents. Eventually, the CIS Peacekeeping Force was turned into an occupation force by the Russian Federation in violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Georgia is fully committed to a zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping personnel. On 5 June, an inter-agency investigative team, set up at the initiative of the Defence Minister of Georgia, left for the Central African Republic to carry out investigative activities on the ground. Also, in response to a Secretariat request, the Government of Georgia presented the candidature of an officer, on a gratis basis, to serve with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, whose focus would be on the legal issues surrounding the sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by international peacekeeping forces.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Georgia's full support for efforts to make peacekeeping more effective and more human-centred, with its primary focus on the responsibility to protect the civilian population.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Romania.

Mr. Jinga (Romania) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for having convened today's high-level open debate on the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations. That is an extremely important topic that touches upon the responsibility of the United Nations in international security. Today, the protection of civilians is a major challenge because 93 per cent of victims of armed conflicts are civilians. That is a horrific figure. The need to find the best ways to ensure such protection has been addressed in several debates and backed by a series of reforms launched in 2015.

Romania associates itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would, however, like to make some remarks in my national capacity.

Given the many ongoing conflicts in the world, we must reiterate that the responsibility to protect civilians in conflict situations devolves upon States. States must prosecute the perpetrators or those responsible for violations of international norms, in particular international humanitarian law. In situations where States do not have the will or capacity to fulfil their responsibilities, the international community is called upon to intervene. That is why Romania will join the French-Mexican initiative for limiting the use of the veto by the five permanent members of the Security Council in cases involving mass atrocities. We recently also supported the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, proposed by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group.

Peacekeeping missions must play a key role through the support they provide to host States in carrying out the responsibility to protect. In that regard, it is absolutely key that United Nations personnel be trained and equipped to interact with local communities and civil-society organizations. Nothing is more detrimental to the legitimacy of peacekeeping missions and the re-establishment of confidence among local populations than Blue Helmets who abuse those whom they should protect.

We think that mixed teams can be quite useful. Women in peacekeeping operations can facilitate contact with women and with the most vulnerable members of local communities. Training courses should be well grounded in respect for human rights. There should be complementarity at the national and international levels with a view to providing personnel in peacekeeping operations with the necessary tools to detect early-warning indicators in cases involving mass atrocities. In that regard, the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative is already part and parcel of the Organization's efforts along those lines.

Romanians who participate in missions under the United Nations flag are given very strict training prior to deployment, including with regard to respect for civil and human rights, with particular attention to the protection of women and children. Over the past 25 years, more than 10,000 Romanian Blue Helmets have contributed to peace and security everywhere in the world and have never been implicated in incidents reflecting non-respect for the local civilian populations, because we apply a zero-tolerance policy for all violations.

The deliberate targeting of civilian schools and hospitals is increasingly common in conflicts. That must cease immediately. Humanitarian access remains a major challenge in many armed conflicts. The recently held first World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul was an opportunity to reaffirm our support for the principles of independence, neutrality and the impartiality of humanitarian action. Romania supported the statement proposed by the United States of America on the protection of civilians, which reaffirms the importance of upholding international humanitarian law.

At the same time, conflict prevention is crucial. It requires additional efforts to reach negotiated political solutions in order to ensure the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1) and deal with the root causes of conflict. That also requires the strengthening of the preventive role of justice and early-warning mechanisms.

Romania has always felt that the effective protection of civilians in armed conflicts was strengthened through cooperation with regional and subregional organizations. Last month, the open debate of the Security Council on that topic showed the importance of enhanced cooperation on the part of the United Nations with the African Union (see S/PV.7694). This past Monday the Council focused on cooperation with the European Union (see S/PV.7705). Both organizations are strategic partners of the United Nations in peacekeeping efforts.

In conclusion, the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations is extremely important for the reputation and credibility of the United Nations. Upholding the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians is essential. They should form the core of all peacekeeping mandates. Romania has endorsed the Kigali Principles, and that decision bears witness to the commitment of my country to global efforts to bring peace and security to countries affected by conflicts, while recognizing the primordial importance of the human dimension of protection.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the African Union.

Mr. António (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me, Sir, to warmly congratulate your country on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, for their very informative briefings this morning.

I would also like to welcome many dignitaries who are present here today, particularly Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, who gave us the views of his country and its priorities, which we believe all partners must listen to carefully, bearing in mind the principle of national ownership, if we want our efforts to succeed in the Central African Republic.

We do not need long speeches or learned references in order to emphasize the importance of the protection of civilians, which plays an ever more central role in United Nations peacekeeping operations and regional peacekeeping operations.

For the African Union, the protection of civilians is a problem that is integrated into the perception of security, and it is a major challenge for peace. That concept, which the African Union renders as the principle of non-indifference to human suffering, is one of the most remarkable developments accompanying the passage of the Organization of African Unity to the African Union.

In this context, the entire nomenclature of the founding and regulatory acts of the AU is in line with this philosophy, which aims primarily to preserve the peace and security of populations in all circumstances, the latter being seen as a key factor in social and economic development. In this regard, for the African Union, peace and security is a fundamental prerequisite for any development policy as well as for integration of the continent. The protection of civilians is understood within this overall philosophy and is an integral part of it.

While it is true that the context of peacekeeping has changed dramatically over the last decade, the same cannot be said of the concept and practice of United Nations peacekeeping which, setting aside some notable exceptions, continues to be underpinned by the formal principles of impartiality, neutrality and the limited use of force. In contrast, the practice of the African Union in this area is based on the principle of non-indifference to human suffering, which in practice often leads to the deployment of robust missions to protect civilians. Accordingly, since 2003, the AU has mandated the deployment of more than 70,000 uniformed personnel and about 1,500 civilians in the framework of nine deployed operations with robust mandates, which, most often, have as their main tasks the protection of civilians, the neutralization of armed or terrorist groups, and the promotion of State authority.

Alongside the deployment of peacekeeping operations on the ground, the African Union is striving to strengthen its long-term capacity through the operationalization of the African Standby Force, which provides the capacity for rapid deployment in the event of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity. It is a matter of the African Union intervening without delay to save lives. These interventions can be performed with or without the consent of any member State whose peoples' lives are threatened.

This approach, which is in tension with United Nations practice, requires us to think about the model of cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union with a view to achieving effective and modern peacekeeping in the service of the protection of civilians. From our perspective, this approach involves, on the one hand, the search for the right balance between preserving important aspects of traditional principles of peacekeeping and, on the other, the need for increased use of force. It also requires a thorough review of the limits of peacekeeping, including when it comes to the fight against terrorist groups.

Instituting a more consolidated model of cooperation between the United Nations and African Union could offer appropriate answers to some of these existential challenges. In this regard, it is essential to consolidate the shared responsibility that begins to emerge when the African Union acts as first responder to stabilize the situation in countries experiencing conflict, creating conditions for the United Nations to deploy peacekeeping operations at a later stage.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): I will start by thanking the French presidency for convening this important debate on an issue that should be at the very core of our efforts in the Organization.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union. I will now make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

A quarter of a century ago, the United Nations and the international community were unable to protect civilians in my own country in an effective manner and failed to stop genocide in Srebrenica and in Rwanda. The reasons for those tragic failures, which brought so much suffering and which will keep haunting many people for years to come, were not only due to the insufficient presence of the Blue Helmets on the ground, but also because the United Nations troops lacked a clear, precise mandate for what would seem their foremost duty — the protection of civilians from military and paramilitary attacks.

A point that was valid then is equally valid today. We are faced with the frightening reality of unprecedented suffering caused by conflicts in many parts of the world, and the credibility of United Nations peacekeeping operations depends largely on their ability to act when civilians are threatened. In peacekeeping operations, there can be no higher duty than that.

Although significant progress, in particular at the normative level, has been made in the past two decades since this Council recognized the protection of civilians as central to its mandate, it has not yet been sufficiently translated into a systematic and consistent protection of civilians on the ground. Protection of civilians is currently mandated in the majority of peacekeeping missions, which represents a step forward, but what really matters is the final action on the ground. For us, strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflicts should be centred in the following points.

First, all parties should comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and, when atrocities do occur, accountability must be ensured. The International Criminal Court plays a particularly important role in this regard.

Secondly, the Human Rights Up Front initiative and the responsibility to protect are pivotal prevention tools at hand, and we must use them to the best of our ability in order to strengthen national capacities to detect and respond to early signs of violations and risks of atrocious crimes.

Thirdly, the concept of sustaining peace must lie at the core of our efforts to ensure protection of civilians. This involves the effective elimination of the root causes of conflict, starting with the lack of development, justice and respect for human rights. The Sustainable Development Goals and all the related achievements in 2015 provide us with the tools required; there can be no excuse for not using them.

Fourthly, the peacekeeping and peacebuilding reviews under way are bringing prevention to the centre of international peace and security discussions. We need to ensure that it remains there and that it is transformed into concrete action.

We have stated on multiple occasions that the protection of civilians is first and foremost the responsibility of national authorities. However, the international community has to assume its part of the responsibility for protection and take collective action through the Security Council if and when national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations.

Croatia fully supports the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as the French-Mexican initiative on the suspension of the veto power in cases of mass atrocities. We believe that efforts must be undertaken with a view to improving the performance of all actors that share a stake in protecting innocent civilians from violence. It is therefore crucial to develop comprehensive protection strategies in close consultation with host Governments, local authorities, contributing countries and other relevant actors.

Additionally, Member States must ensure that their military and police personnel uphold the highest values of human rights and receive predeployment training in line with United Nations standards. In that vein, we should strengthen our responses to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations missions and demand full accountability at all levels. It is absolutely impossible for us to tolerate that some who come to protect become perpetrators themselves.

Adequate representation of female personnel is another crucial element in our efforts to combat sexual violence, promote gender awareness among the host nations' populations, and improve relationships between peacekeepers and local citizens. To contribute to this goal, Croatia has organized two United Nations training courses — in May 2015 and another in April 2016 — for female police officers from several countries of Asia and Africa as predeployment preparation for peacekeeping operations.

In conclusion, we must translate our normative and policy progress into concrete action to protect human life, reaffirm the principle of humanity, and save millions of people in far too many conflicts and crisis areas around the world. And we must learn from our previous failures; unfortunately, we cannot correct some of the tragic mistakes, but at least we can avoid repeating them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): I would like to express my delegation's appreciation for the convening of this important debate, where we are considering what has become a central component of every United Nations peacekeeping mission.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We wish to begin by commending the Secretary-General for his latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2016/447) and the recommendations contained therein. The report is crucial in monitoring and reporting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The report paints a gloomy picture as it once again highlights the fact that civilians continue to suffer the most as a consequence or armed conflict. Not only are civilians indiscriminately killed or injured, but they face such severe hardships as violations of their basic human rights, including sexual violence and mass displacement. We stress that the Secretary-General should remain resolute regarding the identification of perpetrators. The protection of civilians must remain one of the core issues on the agenda of the Security Council if we are to save succeeding generations form the scourge of war.

We all recognize that States have the primary responsibility to put an end to impunity and to prosecute perpetrators responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including those relating to sexual violence against women and girls. However, the international community today is increasingly being challenged by the changing nature of conflicts, which requires us to adopt new, more holistic strategies in protecting civilians. I wish to focus my remarks today on three aspects in addressing our protection of civilians imperative.

First, our action has to go beyond traditional peacekeeping and the use of force. It must begin with steps to prevent conflicts rather than respond to them after the fact. Addressing the social and economic development challenges facing civilians, as reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1) is also crucial in that regard. The link between economic development and peace requires that the United Nations principle organs and development agencies, within their respective mandates, address the root causes of conflict and contribute towards the realization of the sustainable development goals.

Furthermore, strengthening and investing greater efforts in prevention and finding all-inclusive political solutions to conflicts is necessary. Settling conflict through pacific means should remain our priority, including by ensuring that our efforts in this regard are impartial and not selective. In this connection, the failure of the Council to address long-standing challenges in Palestine and Western Sahara will continue to undermine its credibility.

Secondly, steps have to be taken to strengthen accountability for crimes committed against civilians. Ensuring accountability is vital to the credibility of the protection of civilians and is key to delivering global justice.

Thirdly, and coming to the key aspects of today's debate, is ensuring that the peacekeeping operations deployed by the Council are adequately equipped and resourced to address their protection of civilians mandates. The High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations and the report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture (S/2015/490) stress that all United Nations peace operations have an obligation to protect civilians. We welcome steps taken by the Secretariat to ensure that peacekeeping operations develop strategies to protect civilians. That includes the appointment of protection of civilians advisers and the cooperation and use of military, police and civilian elements in carrying out this task. As the Secretary-General has noted,

> "the credibility of United Nations peacekeepers depends largely on their willingness and capability to act when civilians are threatened" (*S/2016/447, para. 58*).

In order for the United Nations to be effective in its peacekeeping operations when carrying out its mandate to protect civilians, it should also, through the use of Chapter VIII of the Charter, make use of the comparative advantages of regional arrangements in advancing the protection of civilians in conflict situations, as demonstrated in Darfur and Somalia. The African Union (AU) has shown itself to be willing and able to take concrete steps to ensure peace and stability on the African continent. However, the lack of predictable, flexible and, increasingly, sustainable financing for AU operations can undermine the AU's efforts in this regard. The challenges faced by the African Union Mission in Somalia are a case in point.

South Africa condemns sexual exploitation and abuses committed during armed conflict. We believe that protecting the most vulnerable populations — that is, women, girls and children — is central to any protection of civilians mandate. It is for that reason that any acts of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers are particularly deplorable. When the very people charged with protecting civilians become the violators, the trust established between these communities and United Nations missions is betrayed and the credibility of the United Nations compromised.

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate that it is important for the Council to periodically evaluate its response to the protection of civilians, as the protection of civilians from the scourge of conflict is at the core of maintaining international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Charwath (Austria): I would like to thank France for convening this timely open debate. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations.

Of course, Austria fully aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians, respectively. In our national capacity, we would like to highlight a few additional points. I have three remarks to make on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations.

Firtst, it is clear to us that peacekeeping operations have an important role to play when it comes to the protection of civilians. Even where the United Nations has deployed troops, we are convinced that the sustainable protection of civilians can be achieved only through durable peace and political solutions. As such, it is paramount that peacekeeping missions follow a whole-of-mission approach to the protection of civilians.

Secondly, we cannot overemphasize the need to provide adequate training and equipment to military and police personnel deployed in United Nations peace operations. To strengthen this aspect, all troop- and police-contributing countries need to improve the cooperation and transparency of their national training efforts and bring them in line with the relevant United Nations standards. The certification of such training courses is an excellent opportunity to do so, and Austria is proud to be among the first countries to obtain such certification for our national protection of civilians training course. We are very happy to be able to host the United Nations workshop for the development of protection of civilians training material, in close cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, this fall.

Thirdly, another key aspect for a more effective protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations is the timely availability of threat and risk assessments. It is therefore important to further develop an integrated intelligence-gathering and analysis capacity to improve situational awareness. Because we believe in the importance of effective peacekeeping operations to the protection of civilians, Austria gladly endorsed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians in the margins of the General Assembly debate on peace and security last month, and we are very encouraged to see the number of supporters grow.

I have just a few remarks to make on the protection of civilians where there is no United Nations mission. While peacekeeping operations play an important role in the protection of civilians, there are many conflicts where civilians are under attack, yet there is no mission in place to protect them. We welcome the findings and recommendations of the Secretary-General in his latest report (S/2016/447). We continue to call for full compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as for accountability, including through the International Criminal Court.

One of the most severe current challenges in this field is the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We strongly welcome the Secretary-General's focus on this issue in his report, and were pleased to see it feature prominently at the World Humanitarian Summit. Together with a number of other countries, Austria used this opportunity to subscribe to one of the Summit's core commitments related to the use of these weapons, pledged an additional commitment and hosted a side event on this issue. Austria continues to support the objective of an international political commitment dedicated to the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and joins the Secretary-General in his call on all States to engage in this initiative.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the most efficient way of protecting civilians is by preventing and ending armed conflicts. Hence we fully support the work of the United Nations to find political settlements to conflicts and to strengthen its mediation and conflict-prevention capacity, including the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative. In this context, it goes without saying that we support further implementation of the women and peace and security and the children and armed conflict agendas.

I would like to assure the Council that Austria will continue to work closely with all interested stakeholders to further strengthen the protection of civilians.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to thank the French presidency for having convened this debate.

(*spoke in English*)

The protection of civilians in armed conflict remains a deep concern for Estonia, as do the particular needs of women and children. As was expressed by my delegation in this Chamber last week (see S/PV.7704), sexual violence in conflict is also a continuing concern. Children are among the most vulnerable in armed conflicts and pay a high price; they are recruited, injured, deliberately killed, suffer sexual abuse and are abducted and maimed. Their schools and homes are destroyed, and they are denied food, water and health care. We are outraged that such suffering continues. As President of the UNICEF Executive Board this year, Estonia is doing its utmost to draw attention to the need for all of us to work together to put an end to these violations and protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse in all its forms.

Mr. President, while I align myself fully with the statement delivered here today by the Deputy Head of the European Union delegation, I should like now to touch upon the areas presented in your concept note for today's discussion (S/2016/503, annex).

It is clear that States themselves have the primary responsibility to protect their citizens. At the same time, it is also the main task of peacekeeping operations. We believe that such operations, in order to be effective, need to be equipped with a clear set of goals, strong mandates and exit strategies.

For protection of civilians, relations with local actors and non-governmental organizations as well as cooperation with regional and international organizations is crucial. Local governments and civil-society organizations have an important role to play in providing United Nations peacekeepers with information that could help prevent and stop violations. Furthermore, a strategy for engaging the local community is important, since this will increase trust in peacekeeping. However, closer cooperation should be tied to an increase in transparency on the part of local and regional actors.

We are greatly concerned that the protection of civilians is challenged by disrespect for international humanitarian law by some States and non-State armed groups, as well as a sense of impunity for violations.

It is of the utmost importance that humanitarian aid organizations such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Médecins Sans Frontières be able to help people affected by conflict without being targets themselves.

Estonia strongly supports the training of all troops to improve peacekeeping missions' understanding of the need to protect civilians, as well as the idea of having gender advisers in all peacekeeping operations. Better implementation of the relevant United Nations standards and United Nations-certified training materials on the protection of civilians is needed. Pre-deployment and in-mission training should also include issues such as sexual exploitation and abuse as well as child protection.

In this context, let me once again express serious concern over the significant increase in the number of allegations of sexual exploitation by United Nations peacekeepers. In this regard, Estonia fully supports the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy.

In concluding, I would like to reiterate the important role of the International Criminal Court and the necessary cooperation between the Court and peacekeeping missions. Estonia believes that when a peace operation is to be deployed in an International Criminal Court situation country, its mandate should authorize it to facilitate or assist the Court.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

I would like to thank the French presidency for holding this open debate and preparing the concept note (S/2016/503, annex). I also thank briefers for their inputs to this debate, which provides an opportunity for all Member States to evaluate the contribution of United Nations peacekeeping operations to the protection of civilians.

The international community is deeply concerned, because civilians are under attack as never before. Despite all of the efforts made at the international level and by the relevant humanitarian institutions, it is most unfortunate that civilians still account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts. According to last year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/453), approximately 42 per cent of the world's poor now live in conflict-affected States, and that figure is expected to rise to 62 per cent by 2030. Direct attacks on schools and hospitals have become common features of many armed conflicts. Humanitarian and health-care workers are being deliberately targeted. Humanitarian action is at the core of the United Nations Charter, and civilians caught up in armed conflict have a right to be protected by their respective States.

In this regard, NAM believes that due priority should continue to be given to the promotion of States' knowledge of, respect for and observance of the obligations they assumed under the Charter of the United Nations and international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in particular the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Protocols.

We call upon all parties to armed conflict to redouble their efforts to comply with their legal obligations by, inter alia, prohibiting the targeting of civilian populations and civilian property and stressing their responsibility to ensure general protection against the dangers arising from military operations to civilian installations, hospitals and relief materials and the means to transport and distribute such relief materials.

The Movement reiterates its condemnation of the increasing number of attacks on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and urges the Governments of States Members of the United Nations to ensure respect for the protection of the personnel of humanitarian organizations, in conformity with the relevant provisions of international law.

Furthermore, the Non-Aligned Movement emphasizes that the principles of the sovereign equality, political independence and territorial integrity of all States and of non-intervention must be upheld. The consent of the country is also imperative in granting access to humanitarian assistance to its territory and for its continued operation at all times.

United Nations peacekeeping missions constitute one of the means at the disposal of the United Nations to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict. Since 1999, the Security Council has tasked United Nations peacekeeping missions with protection mandates. Such protection mandates include establishing effective early-warning mechanisms; ensuring the provision of adequate resources to monitor, prevent, and respond to incidents; and supporting the efforts of host-country authorities to implement their responsibilities in protecting civilians.

NAM acknowledges that the protection of civilians is currently mandated in a number of United Nations peacekeeping missions, and within this context stresses that United Nations peacekeeping operations, in particular with protection of civilian mandates, should be guided by the principles of the Charter and not be used as a means for Government change and military intervention. The Movement underlines that the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the host country, and accordingly emphasizes that relevant United Nations peacekeeping missions with such mandates should conduct their tasks without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the host Government to protect civilians. Efforts of the United Nations must be in support of and not in substitution for those of national authorities.

We stress that the successful conduct of tasks related to the protection of civilians requires the integration of efforts at all levels and a holistic approach that encompasses the timely provision of adequate resources, logistical support and required training, as well as clearly defined and achievable mandates. In this regard, we acknowledge again the importance for United Nations peacekeeping operations to support and build synergies, and to coordinate with host Governments, including at the local level, in protecting the civilian population.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms the importance of protecting civilians in conflict situations, establishing accountability for violations of international humanitarian law, and putting an end to impunity. In this context, NAM supports the call made by Palestine regarding the protection of the Palestinian people.

Let me conclude by expressing the hope that this open debate will provide an opportunity to assess the ways and means of providing better protection to civilians in armed conflict. We need to identify not only the positive developments achieved so far, but the challenges ahead.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Miss Hassan (Djibouti) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank the French presidency for having organized this high-level open debate of the Security Council on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations.

Djibouti endorses the statement made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

At the outset, I express the gratitude of my delegation to the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their contribution to this important open debate. We also wish to thank you, Sir, for the concept note written in anticipation of this meeting (S/2016/503, annex).

The Security Council has already had the opportunity to discuss this issue in depth. The successive reports of the Secretary-General and the many recommendations therein have helped shed light not only on the progress made but also on the major challenges remaining. Given the importance of the issue, my delegation is convinced of the need to increase the opportunities to identify together a common analysis of the challenges and the ever-more precise operational guidelines to assist the forces of peace in their activities to protect civilians.

The Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians are useful in that they draw lessons from past failures. Djibouti adheres to the Principles because they represent a significant step towards better protection for civilians in peacekeeping operations. We also believe that the lessons learned from the public discussion of strengthening the cooperative relationship between the United Nations and regional organizations could help to better meet the challenges posed to the forces of peace in the protection of civilians.

(*spoke in English*)

In 1999, the Security Council took the historic step of adopting resolution 1265 (1999), which recognizes the protection of civilians as the raison d'être of the Security Council. Significant progress has been made since then with regard to the development of institutional and operational tools by the General Assembly and the Secretariat in order to strengthen United Nations action. As States have the primary responsibility to protect their citizens, the United Nations should support the building of relevant national capacities and enhance synergy among various national actors.

Last Friday, the United Nations Police Division, organized a high-level meeting on United Nations concepts of operations, aimed at raising various issues, such as the mandate of peacekeepers in protecting civilians. Most missions are already mandated to protect civilians, but mandate implementation by peacekeepers often fails. Threats on the ground must inform mission mandates, strategies and structures. Training and early warning capacity must be improved for that purpose. Gender-sensitive training should be a central part of security sector reform and concrete efforts must be made to increase women's engagement in that sector.

(*spoke in French*)

Djibouti has participated in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur since 2012. The proximity of our troops through civil engineering projects, such as building roads, and donations of medicine and medical supplies is aimed at establishing a unique and special relationship that helps to reassure the local population while promoting mission sustainability.

Moreover, in December 2011 Djibouti joined the African Union Mission in Somalia. The Mission is mandated to support the process of reconciliation and peace in that country and has allowed Djiboutian troops to secure areas recovered from Al-Shabaab while establishing parallel relationships of trust with the local population. Indeed, we consider the link between the protection of civilians and peacekeeping mandates to be critical. The safety of civilians is crucial to the legitimacy and credibility of peacekeeping missions.

Djibouti does not yet have structures dedicated to international humanitarian law, but has begun to build the relevant capacities of its troops deployed abroad.

Djibouti, as a State party to the Geneva Convention, participated in the consultations initiated by the Swiss Government and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) between 2012 and 2015 to identify ways to enhance respect for international and humanitarian law. This is a crucial issue, and we share the main motivation behind this initiative to prevent the credibility of international humanitarian law from gradually being eroded and impunity from being subtly established as the norm.

We take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to Switzerland and the ICRC for the various options and recommendations submitted for consideration by members of the thirty-second International Conference, which met in December 2015, and express the hope that the intergovernmental process that has been launched to reach agreement on the functions and modalities of a governmental forum for international humanitarian law will produce the desired results.

We will all benefit from contributing to creating a world that respects the dignity of human beings, even in wartime. Let us protect civilians and champion the rights of the undocumented. This slogan drafted by Hannah Arendt is somewhat contradictory, it is true, but used deliberately to emphasize the difficulty of exercising fundamental rights in the context of armed conflicts that are often cruel and violent.

(*spoke in English*)

In conclusion, the challenges to peace operations should be resolved by implementing effective strategies on the ground. Impunity must end, and all violators must be held accountable. Tools should be strengthened to bring criminals to justice, and peacekeeping operations should pay particular attention to the protection of civilians. All relevant departments of the United Nations should be coordinated in their efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict. Follow-up and sharper and more organized focus on resolutions are required.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Barriga (Liechtenstein): It has been a very long day, so rather than reading out my statement I will try to summarize its most important points.

There have been important appeals by parties to conflict for the norms that safeguard humankind to be upheld, most recently at the World Humanitarian Summit, but we believe that such appeals must be supported by concrete action, especially by the Security Council. We support the Secretary-General's recommendations in that regard, especially that the Council should systematically condemn violations of international humanitarian law by any party to conflict, take action on the most serious violations, to apply targeted sanctions and to mandate commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions. Most important, the Council should refer situations of large-scale impunity, such as those in Syria, to the International Criminal Court and ensure the necessary follow-up.

The potential for United Nations peacekeeping operations to enhance accountability efforts is still largely untapped, but there are also encouraging signs of progress, such as the example of the direct support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic for the special criminal court of the Central African Republic and the International Criminal Court. We believe that the Council should consistently task peacekeeping missions to support the Court's work on the ground. Missions should effectively implement that policy and, in particular, consistently apply the policy of avoiding non-essential contact with fugitives.

Of course, peacekeeping missions can also play a larger role in preventing and ending atrocity crimes. They have unique access to information on the ground that should be put before the Security Council, in accordance with the Human Rights Up Front initiative. Acting on such information is then the responsibility of Council members.

As of this morning, with the addition of Canada, 112 States have joined the code of conduct against atrocity crimes. That includes a majority of the current members of the Council. Those States have committed to making the Council more responsive in cases of mass atrocities. We call on them, as well as on all Council members, to do their utmost to live up to that responsibility.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to congratulate you, Sir, for convening this open debate on an issue that requires all of us to ensure the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations. We are especially pleased that France took the initiative in calling this debate. France continues to lend its support to the African continent at a critical moment when this issue is particularly relevant. Thanks to France's intervention in two brotherly countries — Mali and the Central African Republic — we were able to avoid a new cycle of massacre and suffering.

As we discuss the issue of the protection of civilians, we note that significant progress has been made on the normative front, thanks in particular to the continued attention and commitment of the Council, supported by all States Members of the United Nations, but also by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society. Many resolutions and presidential statements, along with the establishment of specific mandates to protect civilians in some missions, have enabled the establishment of a robust legal framework. However, it is clear that, despite those advances, the state of civilian populations continues to deteriorate, with a continued increase in the number of victims and displaced persons and refugees, as well as widespread violations of international humanitarian law. This bitter fact is all the more distressing when a multidimensional mission is deployed in the field. We hope that the call of the Istanbul Humanitarian Summit will lead to increased respect for international humanitarian law.

Although today's debate is part of the regular review of the protection of civilians, this time from the perspective of peacekeeping operations, we must keep in mind that it was just a few years ago that there were strong misgivings and suspicions concerning this issue. It is in that regard that it is important to reiterate certain key principles.

First, protecting civilians is primarily the responsibility of States. However, it is clear that in times of conflict the capacity of States is either inadequate or nonexistent. In such cases the international community has a responsibility to support them, either through capacity-building and by giving them the means to meet their responsibilities or by deploying a peacekeeping operation.

Secondly, in accordance with the principles of peacekeeping, any intervention by the international community should respect the principles of equality, independence, sovereignty and respect for the territorial integrity of States.

Moreover, the troop-contributing countries have a responsibility to protect civilians. But that is a responsibility shared both with the Security Council and with the Secretariat. Again, the principles are clear— non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate. To enable troops to carry out their mission successfully, the Council must consider the realities on the ground and devote adequate means. The Secretariat must also strengthen cooperation with troop contributors and involve them more in the planning stages.

Allow me now to express the views of my delegation on the avenues for discussion proposed by the concept note (S/2016/503, annex).

First, we consider it desirable to support a preventive approach, that is to say, missions should deploy protection measures so that civilians are not targeted by armed groups. That can be done, for example, by strengthening protection for camps. To achieve that, cooperation with local communities, authorities and NGOs is essential.

Secondly, we must adapt the composition of the force for the different protection stages. Mixed units composed of military and police forces would allow for a better response to the various situations that peacekeeping forces may face. For example, it is agreed that police forces are better suited and equipped for dealing with crowd control.

Thirdly, humanitarian assistance is an important element in the protection of civilians during armed conflict. Support for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need must remain a priority for missions.

Fourthly, the presence of a peacekeeping operation should facilitate the establishment of an environment conducive to the protection of civilians, in particular by contributing to strengthening the rule of law.

The protection of civilians was thoroughly discussed during the recently concluded reviews of the peacebuilding and peacekeeping architecture of the United Nations. Morocco fully supports the recommendations of the High-level Panel on the Review of Peacekeeping Operations, especially with regard to troop-contributing countries.

Moreover, the conduct of Blue Helmets charged with protecting civilians must be irreproachable. In that regard, Morocco reiterates its full commitment to fully implementing the zero-tolerance policy put forward by the Secretary-General. Concrete steps have been taken in that regard by Morocco, including deploying national investigators in its contingents. The cases brought to their attention are treated with with the utmost diligence and firmness.

Again, better cooperation with the Secretariat is necessary, as this is ultimately a shared responsibility. We welcome the efforts made so far in that regard by the Secretariat, and we reiterate our full readiness to continue to cooperate constructively with Special Coordinator Ms. Lute and with unity of conduct and discipline.

It is now time that the concept of civilian protection go beyond mere physical protection to ensure that it can alleviate the suffering of vulnerable populations, which is the true purpose of protecting civilians.

Moroccan troops deployed for more than 60 years as part of peacekeeping operations have always considered the protection of civilians as a key part of their mission. That aspect is properly supported during the predeployment training provided to Moroccan contingents destined to serve under the United Nations banner. In addition to the tasks they are mandated to do, Moroccan contingents have continued to provide support to local communities, particularly in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and, more recently, in the Central African Republic. These efforts generally involve either in-kind or financial resources and medical campaigns. Moroccan troops are also involved in the implementation of quick-impact projects.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Morocco's commitment to the imperative of protecting civilians in armed conflict, whether by troops under the United Nations banner or by supporting capacity-building for States.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Auza: The Holy See commends the presidency of France for bringing this extremely important topic to the attention of the Security Council and to the international community. The long history of peacekeeping operations, with their successes and shortcomings, offers a rich reservoir of lessons learned with which to develop parameters for more effective strategy in conflict prevention and conflict resolution, as well as in defining mandates and rules of engagement. The same history tells us about the evolution in the mandates that peacekeeping missions have been receiving from the Council. For instance, one might presume that an essential mandate of peacekeeping operations has always been the protection of civilians. Yet this is a relatively recent development. In fact, the first peacekeeping operation to receive the explicit mandate to protect civilians was the United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone, only in 1999.

While my delegation considers the protection of civilians a positive evolution of United Nations peacekeeping mandates, paradoxically it also points to the disturbing fact that more and more civilians are being targeted during armed conflict, and indeed used as weapons of war. This is one of the saddest developments in the evolution of armed conflict. In the early 1900s, around 5 per cent of fatalities were civilians, while in the 1990s, over 90 per cent of the fatalities were non-combatants. Recent reports and studies unanimously confirm that deliberate targeting of, and indiscriminate attacks on, civilians are increasing. Untold violence willfully inflicted upon civilian populations and the defiant violations of international humanitarian law in many current conflicts are all too flagrant.

My delegation therefore believes that, in all cases where mass atrocities and other forms of attacks against defenseless civilian populations are being perpetrated or are most likely to happen, the protection of civilians in armed conflict must be a critical component of peacekeeping mission mandates. It would be one of the primary yardsticks with which to measure the success or failure of a peacekeeping mission. Every peacekeeping operation should be, at the end of the day, all about saving lives. The evolution in United Nations mandates also tells us that peacekeeping missions have become much more than instruments for restoring peace after conflicts have erupted. Considering the decisive importance of both prevention and post-conflict peace consolidation, peacekeeping missions must also be deployed to prevent latent conflicts from exploding into open violence and to prevent post-conflict situations from descending again into violence.

While conflict prevention is primarily a function of diplomatic negotiations and mediations and post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding are often seen as the work of development experts and social scientists, particularly grave cases warrant a preventive peacekeeping mission to realistically stop latent conflicts from exploding, thereby sparing populations from the scourges of death and destruction. In the same manner, lessons learned suggest that pulling out peacekeeping missions too early can be extremely costly in every way.

A sure way to protect civilians during armed conflict is the preventive strategy of arms control. The Holy See renews its call upon arms producers and States to limit the manufacture, sale and gifting of horrendous weapons that are later used to terrorize the civilian population or destroy civilian infrastructure.

In the name of Pope Francis, my delegation wishes to express deep appreciation in particular for the work of the peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic. Without ignoring the disturbing allegations of crimes committed by some peacekeepers, and without underestimating the danger that the country could still fall back to violence, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) has contributed substantially to calming down the situation, to assisting the displaced and those victimized, and to maintaining an atmosphere that is conducive to the pacification of the population, the regular functioning of the institutions and the return to normal life. The multidimensional mandate of MINUSCA overall augurs well for the reconstruction and institutional capacity-building efforts that underpin durable peace and sustainable development in the country.

Moreover, the Holy See would like to express its profound gratitude to MINUSCA for all the help it rendered to make the visit of Pope Francis in Bangui safe and fruitful, together with the French forces, of course. The President of the Central African Republic spoke about the fruit of the Pope's visit at the recent World Humanitarian Summit, saying,

> "with the visit of the Holy Father to my country the humanitarian situation has significantly calmed down, characterized by a disarming of the heart, along with a return to the spirit of social cohesion and living together".

The Holy See follows with interest the activities of the United Nations peacekeeping missions in different hotspots in the world and reiterates its commitment to collaborate, where possible, in the work of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict stabilization and peace consolidation.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Paraguay.

Mr. Scappini Ricciardi (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, we welcome the initiative of the French presidency of the Security Council to convene this open debate, particularly in the context of the current humanitarian crisis. We also welcome the report (S/2016/447) of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations are our criteria for the foundations on which peacekeeping operations must function. In that context, we believe it is imperative that both the Security Council and the States Members of the Organization, their capacity as parties to conflict aside, contribute or should contribute to establishing an effective system for the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

With regard to the Security Council, the protection of civilians in armed conflict should be clearly and explicitly included in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. Such protection, as we understand it, must take priority in situations where civilians are at a high risk of violence, and must be explicit with regard to both protection against sexual violence, in a broad sense, and on the special protection of children and adolescents in armed conflicts. For their part, the existing mandates of peacekeeping missions must also be adapted in that regard. The system for the protection of civilians must be improved and, in that connection, the role that can be played by education and training in the area of international humanitarian law and human rights law to halt and prevent acts of violence, attacks and threats against civilians, we believe, is also critical.

Paraguay is currently contributing military personnel to six peacekeeping missions. Paraguayan military personnel receive general training on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, prior to their deployment in peacekeeping missions, and starting this year, also receive specialized and specific training on the subject in Paraguay's training centre for peacekeeping operations. Paraguayan military peacekeeping personnel also receive training on civilian-military coordination and on violence and gender inequality.

In response to the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict and on conflict-related sexual violence, our delegation urges the troop-contributing and police-contributing countries on the lists in those reports to uphold specific commitments and concrete plans to address such violations. Likewise, we believe the contribution of universal political and legal frameworks for the protection of civilians in armed conflict is also relevant. In that regard, Paraguay urges Member States to adhere to the Oslo declaration on safe schools adopted in 2015. We also call upon States to reaffirm their commitment to the Rome Statute, to ratify it and to cooperate with the International Criminal Court in a comprehensive manner.

We cannot fail to mention the link between the topic of this debate and the illicit trade in light weapons and ammunition. In that context, Paraguay calls for the explicit inclusion of ammunition in the regulatory frameworks of small arms and light weapons and in their implementation, and calls upon Member States that have not yet done so to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty. Lastly, we support the Secretary-General's proposal to Member States to constructively participate in formulating a political statement on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

With regard to the current humanitarian crisis, the delegation of Paraguay supports a comprehensive and holistic response by all stakeholders focusing on the protection of civilians in the framework of the principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1).

Finally, the Republic of Paraguay deplores the disregard of the basic standards of international humanitarian law and human rights by parties to conflict, in particular through practices, such as the use of the starvation of civilians as a weapon of war and subjugation, restrictions on humanitarian access and on the protection of civilians, and attacks on the institution of asylum and the principle of non-refoulement.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Let me first thank you, Mr. President, for convening this very important debate on protecting civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations. We also thank the briefers for their respective statements.

Indonesia aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of Thailand on behalf of Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The role of United Nations peacekeeping operations in protecting civilians cannot be overemphasized, and as peacekeepers are increasingly mandated to carry out complex responsibilities in dangerous situations, protecting civilians is indeed one of the most challenging tasks for United Nations peacekeeping missions.

As rightly mentioned in the concept note (S/2016/503, annex), various progress has been made over the past two decades in strengthening international protection frameworks, in particular by the Council. However, the progress and related guidance, concepts and advocacy have not yet been translated into effective action in the field, where the actual improvement is need. It is important that all peacekeeping stakeholders be aware of the gap between the mandate of protecting civilians given by the Council and what the missions can actually deliver with their existing resources. An enhanced role of the Security Council in this regard, along with its regular and meaningful consultation with other peacekeeping actors, are indeed critical. Positive results will be attained when common directions, cooperation and collaboration are well established among the Council, the troop- and police-contributing countries, the Secretariat and host countries.

There must be a well-coordinated whole-of-mission strategy as mentioned by the Secretary-General in his latest report on the protection of civilians (S/2016/447). We also fully agree with him that the sustainable protection of civilians will ultimately require political solutions. It is therefore imperative to ensure that peacekeeping mandates are well defined, realistic and linked to a wider political process, and that missions are provided with all the resources necessary to the implementation of their respective mandates.

My delegation wishes to re-emphasize that the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the host country and, in this context, it shares the view of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations with regard to the supporting role of United Nations peacekeeping missions to relevant Governments in executing that responsibility.

Promoting respect for human rights and international law is a long-term effort, which needs to be nationally owned and supported by the United Nations and the international community. Furthermore, as mentioned in the draft 2016 report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, we wish to re-emphasize the significance of unarmed strategies to protect civilians by United Nations peacekeeping missions as political instruments that can effectively protect civilians by helping to bring an end to violent conflicts, thereby maintaining the confidence of parties in peaceful solutions. It is also in this context that we wish to acknowledge the important role of the United Nations police components, including female police officers, in protecting the civilian population and creating a stable environment, consistent with their mandates.

It would be remiss if we did not include the notion of conflict prevention in this debate. Prevention and peaceful resolution should be given higher priority in peacekeeping missions, and we should ensure that the United Nations is more people-centred and impactful and harnesses the strengths of existing regional entities.

For the safety and security of the threatened populations, as well as of the peacekeepers, it is also essential that the three basic United Nations peacekeeping principles of consent of the parties, impartiality and the non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate continue to be adhered to. We therefore underline that the use of force in United Nations peacekeeping operations should only be the last resort.

We also emphasize that the development and updates of guiding materials and training on how to protect civilians should be widely discussed with Member States. The United Nations system should intensify its efforts to help enable a comprehensive approach to protect civilians.

Human life is indeed the most precious. And the deplorable fact of the increasing deaths of civilians in armed conflict situations deserves our full attention, commitment and action.

Indonesia, with its current participation in 10 United Nations peacekeeping operations, will continue to support and contribute to United Nations efforts to lay down the foundations for sustainable peace. We will also continue to ensure that, before deployment, our peacekeepers receive the most adequate training on civilians' protection.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ireland.

Mr. Donoghue (Ireland): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important debate.

Ireland aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union. We would like to provide the following remarks in a national capacity.

Ireland began participating in United Nations peace operations in 1958, three years after becoming a State Member of the United Nations. The nature of international conflict has changed considerably since then. We have today deliberate attacks on civilians and on their hospitals and schools. We have the proliferation of non-State armed groups and their asymmetric tactics. We have blatant disregard for international human rights and humanitarian law, along with a culture of impunity.

The three high-level reviews of last year pointed to ways to address these issues. First, mandate design must be improved and the needs of civilians must be placed at the centre. No two conflicts are the same; it follows therefore that no two mandates should be identical. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case in United Nations peace operations. We have, too many times, followed a template-style format when designing mission mandates rather than asking the difficult questions: What are the specific needs of this country? Of this conflict? Of these people? And how can we help to meet these needs? While 10 out of 16 peace operations now have protection of civilian mandates, the aim to protect civilians is the intrinsic reason any mission exists. The protection of civilians must be at the heart of the planning process, with more proactive and robust political, civilian and military interventions for protection allowed for throughout all missions.

Secondly, our peacekeeping and protection efforts must be grounded in respect for international law. Peace missions are often deployed in situations where there has been an almost complete break-down in the rule of law. At the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Ireland made a specific commitment to ensure that our personnel deployed on overseas peacekeeping missions operate at the highest standards in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law. We also committed to ensuring accountability for any failure that would amount to a crime under international law, and we are pleased to be among the growing list of Member States that have endorsed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

While it is important to advance and propagate international frameworks for the protection of civilians, we need to ensure that this is felt on the ground. Next week, the United Nations Training School Ireland will host training for both national and international students on the protection of civilians. Now in its second year, this Irish Defence Forces initiative allows participants to share best practices from the ground, while delivering valuable training, including in the area of international human rights law. Furthermore, we cannot allow impunity for violations of some of the most basic tenets of international law in the area of the protection of civilians. Tackling the issue demands a comprehensive approach to capacity-building from Member States and the international and regional system alike.

Thirdly, the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda is a valuable tool to advance the protection of civilians. Resolution 1325 (2000) was a milestone for the Council. It acknowledged that women and girls face specific risks in conflict settings, which require specific actions for protection. Ireland works to mainstream gender throughout military operations by appointing gender advisers in each brigade and formation, and we have prioritized diversity in our Defence Forces' recently launched recruitment drive. The first workshop of gender advisers from across regional organizations, which Ireland hosted this month, is another firm step towards ensuring the participation of women in peacekeeping. Furthermore, Ireland is resolute in its belief that the heinous crime of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers can be fully stamped out, including by strengthened predeployment and ongoing professional training programmes.

I conclude on a potentially paradoxical note. Ireland believes that every discussion of peacekeeping operations should include the following question: How can we prevent the deployment of those operations in the first instance? A successful whole-of-United Nations approach to peacebuilding and conflict prevention will require embedding in peace operations the objective of tackling the root causes of their deployment.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Sareer (Maldives): Let me begin by expressing our gratitude to the French presidency of the Security Council for convening this high-level open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which has become one of the most critical humanitarian challenges for the Council. This debate is particularly timely following the recent General Assembly thematic debate on the United Nations, peace and security and the World Humanitarian Summit. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/447) on this issue, which comprehensively examines the key issues at hand and provides a useful starting point for today's dialogue.

Although Governments and parties bear the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, it is evident that United Nations peacekeeping operations have had and will continue to have a role in the protection of civilians in armed conflict. To further enhance that role, the Security Council and the respective Member States must make the protection of civilians a clear priority in determining the scope and mandates of peacekeeping missions, while respecting the primacy of the host Government. They must set out clear and comprehensive guidelines to identify threats to civilians according to the local context, along with respective response strategies, and ensure that adequate staff is deployed to implement those mandates effectively.

Peacekeeping operations should also work closely with the local communities and Governments in the conflict-affected zones to monitor and assess their performance in fulfilling their mandates. In order to facilitate that, mechanisms for community outreach can be formulated in order to establish networks within local communities. These can be built on lessons learned from past experiences in the coordination between peacekeeping operations and communities, which are highlighted in the Secretary-General's report.

As a country that has recently signed an agreement with the United Nations with the intention of contributing to the noble objective of peacekeeping, Maldives recognizes the importance of providing training to personnel on the protection of civilians. Those priorities should be integrated into their basic training at the national level, as well as into preparation for specific missions through the United Nations. The principles of international human rights law and humanitarian law should also be an integral part of their national training to ensure that those principles are adhered to at all times. It is also essential to monitor and assess the actions of peacekeepers to ensure that they are upholding the mandate assigned to them. In that regard, we welcome the development of new indicators to better evaluate the performance of such mandates and to enhance the efficiency of peacekeeping operations, as recommended in the Secretary-General's report.

In the context of the protection of civilians, it is important to consider the protection of civilian infrastructure. Too often, we observe that civilian buildings in conflict zones, especially schools and medical facilities, are being targeted with alarming regularity. Not only do such attacks result in the tragic loss of lives, but they also infringe on the basic human rights of civilians. They deprive civilians of the sources of their livelihood, impede access to basic material needs, and severely impair the provision of educational and health services.

The all-too-common result is the creation of a broken society. In the aftermath of armed conflict, civilians are confronted with the stark realities of destroyed homes and infrastructure, limited opportunities for gainful employment, a generation of youth without access to a functional educational system, the spread of preventable disease in the absence of adequate health care, and the widespread destruction of cultural heritage. Those present what are often almost insurmountable challenges to a meaningful recovery from conflict, leading to continued weakness in social, political and economic institutions. Such weaknesses create a breeding ground for future hostility and lead to a potentially self-perpetuating cycle of conflict. It is therefore critical that we devise a robust framework for the protection of civilians and assist in the rapid reconstruction and rehabilitation of societies in conflict zones.

As the events of the past year have sadly shown us, the protection of civilians in armed conflicts is an issue on which much work remains to be done to satisfactorily achieve that goal. We applaud the work of the Security Council towards that end, and we believe that the Secretary-General's recommendations, as well as constructive input from this debate, when implemented, will have a meaningful impact on furthering the protection of civilians and the recovery of societies during and after armed conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Cambodia.

Mr. Tuy (Cambodia): First, allow me to congratulate France on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June and for organizing this open debate on the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations today.

I wish to associate myself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement made by the representative of Thailand on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). I wish to deliver this statement in my national capacity.

Armed conflicts that have spread across continents, along with recurring terrorist attacks throughout the globe, have exerted an unbearable toll on civilian populations, making United Nations peacekeeping operations obligatory. I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for the thought-provoking questions in your concept note (S/2016/503, annex), highlighting how peacekeeping operations can do more to provide protection to civilians.

Peacekeeping operations are becoming increasingly complex and varied. Widespread terrorism, mass displacements of populations, large-scale disease outbreaks and climate change have strained international resources and undermined the effectiveness of peacekeeping efforts globally. As peacekeeping components of multidimensional operations are designed to protect the most vulnerable population, they should show more caring and humanitarian responsibilities in carrying out their duties. Cambodia advocates zero tolerance of sexual violence against children and of serious crimes committed by United Nations peacekeepers and staff. The protection of civilians should be the motto of their missions.

Protection should cover civilians in both conflict and non-conflict areas where peacekeepers are stationed. In this instance, it is necessary to promote the rule of law at the national and international levels. States have the primary responsibility to protect civilians. Therefore, countries hosting peacekeeping operations should work more to strengthen their national rule of law, particularly as it relates to legislation on the protection of civilians. In this light, the predeployment and in-mission training of United Nations peacekeepers and staff are critical to protecting the civilian population. Training should focus on United Nations standards of conduct, the obligation to observe the laws of the host country, and the promotion of humanitarian legal principles.

Mine action makes it possible for peacekeepers to carry out patrols and allow humanitarian agencies to deliver assistance to ordinary citizens to live without fear. For this reason, Cambodia has contributed more than 3,000 Blue Helmet troops to United Nations peacekeeping operations worldwide. Through its National Peacekeeping Operations Centre, Cambodia looks forward to hosting training sessions, jointly run by national and international experts, in the field of demining and the destruction of explosive remnants of war. Moreover, the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre was inaugurated in May in Cambodia as a centre of excellence to address the impacts of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

While coordinated actions among the military and civilian peacekeepers and local authorities are being conducted, it is important to closely monitor and report on the evolving security situation on the ground in order to ensure a prompt response. In this sense, if peacekeeping operations are to succeed on the ground they will require the involvement of all stakeholders, ranging from international organizations to the Security Council, which is the organ responsible for setting the mandates peacekeeping operations.

My country well understands the challenges that United Nations peacekeepers are facing. The lessons learned from my country are that when rebellious groups were not taking part in the United Nations-arranged peace process, civilians in the most dangerous areas were not adequately protected. Whenever, there was an attack by the rebellious groups, either on civilians or on peacekeepers, there was no effective response from the United Nations, except to adopt a silent attitude that only caused more trouble in the country. Therefore, I believe that effective measures should be taken to ameliorate such situations.

On a wider perspective, the lessons learned have taught us that clear peacekeeping mandates, together with political support, sufficient resources and adequate financial and logistical support, are the key elements necessary for the United Nations to effectively safeguard and protect the most vulnerable civilian population in conflict situations.

Finally, I cannot conclude without appreciating the ongoing efforts of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support to improve the performance of peacekeeping operations by developing a conceptual framework and protection of civilians strategies, as well as training courses for personnel to be deployed.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Mendoza-García (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica thanks the French presidency for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations. This initiative is of great importance to my country, and we urge the Council to pursue this healthy practice, which enriches the debate and political dialogue of the Council.

We have analysed the concept note that has been circulated (S/2016/503, annex) and the report of the Secretary-General of May 13 (S/2016/447), and we wish to refer to some of the issues raised therein.

Costa Rica shares with the Secretary-General the sense that most of the deaths, suffering and displacement of civilians in armed conflict could be prevented if the parties involved respected the fundamental norms of international law and human rights law. We are alarmed by the atrocities committed against civilians, the disregard for human life, the rape of women and girls, indiscriminate and deliberate attacks on civilians, including the bombing of schools and places of worship, the use of children as human bombs to carry out suicide bombings and as soldiers, the kidnapping and killing of humanitarian workers and journalists, and the destruction of hospitals and ambulances.

That is why we join the voices that advocate the non-use of schools and universities for military purposes in armed conflict. In that regard, Costa Rica categorically condemns terrorism and urges the Security Council to redouble its efforts to combat these acts of barbarism, in the framework of international law, to consider options to use the sanctions committees more effectively to that end, and to bring those responsible to justice. Justice is necessary if peace is to be sustainable.

Costa Rica reiterates its concern over and strong condemnation of the repeated instances of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations troops who have been entrusted with the protection of civilians, discredited international efforts and let down those they were supposed to to protect. In this regard, we support the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and other criminal conduct, and we advocate in favour of accountability at all levels so as to ensure that those responsible face the consequences of their criminal acts. Impunity cannot be accommodated.

Costa Rica recognizes the importance of and is pleased that the Security Council, in resolution 2272 (2016), has welcomed the Secretary-General's enhanced programme of action to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel, and we call on States to cooperate with its implementation. In most cases, the United Nations represents the last glimmer of hope for communities and victims. The Organization cannot fail in protecting civilians. Cases of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by its own officials damage the credibility of peacekeeping operations, a fundamental pillar of the Organization. They prevent the implementation of peacekeeping mandates and warp the local population's perception of the Organization's fairness with.

The protection of civilians must be a State priority and points to the need to find viable political solutions to conflicts and ensure that there will be no impunity for crimes committed against civilians, as well as to work in close coordination with humanitarian and community organizations in the field, which can be of great help in the early detection of threats to civilians. However, the international community must also act to end the proliferation and international sale of weapons, explosives and cluster munitions through the signing and ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty, including its provision concerning the gender violence criterion; the signing and ratification of the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions; the strengthening of the International Criminal Court through the signing of the Rome Statute; and above all the signatories' respect for and adherence to its provisions, as well as the guarantee that cases referred by the Security Council enjoy the financial resources needed to ensure the fulfillment of the Court's duties.

In addition, the waves of international displaced persons and refugees require the international community to take concrete action to support these people in mitigating their vulnerability and finding protection in their host communities. We must not lose sight of the fact that a new approach that takes into account the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1) is needed, and that it imposes on us the challenge not to leave anyone one behind.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ethiopia.

Ms. Hailu (Ethiopia) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I would like to begin, first of all, by congratulating your country on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June 2016. I would also like to thank you, Sir, for convening this debate on the protection of civilians in the context of peacekeeping operations. This meeting could not be more timely and relevant in the light of the specific recommendations made by the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) (S/2015/446) and the Secretary-General's implementation report on the protection of civilians (S/2016/447). I also thank the briefers for their briefings this morning.

(*spoke in English*)

We all know that peacekeeping has evolved and adapted itself to changing security circumstances. That is why most, if not all, of the peacekeeping operations authorized by the Security Council today have protection-of-civilians mandates. There is no doubt that the primary responsibility for protecting civilians rests with the host country, but in situations where that is not possible and innocent civilians are at risk, United Nations peacekeeping operations cannot and should not remain indifferent. The shirking of responsibility by peacekeepers for the protection of civilians in the face of dire circumstances is indefensible.

We are pleased to note that the HIPPO report has recognized that fact. For us in Africa, that is a very important matter, and we believe the lessons learned from the bitter experiences of the Rwandan genocide should never be forgotten. That is why we have made a paradigm shift from the principle of non-interference to one of non-indifference in grave circumstances involving human rights violations and crimes against humanity. That perspective is clearly enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

Although there has been much progress in setting the normative frameworks for the protection of civilians, challenges persist with respect to translating such a mandate into action in the field. Undoubtedly, there needs to be significant improvement in the provision of peacekeeping operations with clear and succinct protection-of-civilians mandates. But no matter how elegant or elaborate the mandate, unless it is put into practice by those that are in a position to make a difference, not much can be achieved. The enormous gaps in terms of the readiness, capacity and training of United Nations peacekeeping operations in carrying out protection-of-civilians mandates should also be seriously looked into and adequately addressed.

Ethiopia is one of the leading troop-contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping operations. The protection of civilians is, therefore, very relevant to our peacekeepers, who are deployed in some of the most volatile situations in Africa. It is not a matter of theory but a practical challenge, one that our peacekeepers face on a day-to-day basis, risking their own lives. That is why we attach great importance to the protection of civilians and why we are one of those countries that have endorsed the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians. For us in Ethiopia, subscribing to those principles was not difficult as such, because we believe that our peacekeepers are already practicing them.

It is encouraging to note that a number of countries have committed themselves to upholding those principles, and we hope they will eventually become the norm in United Nations peacekeeping. That will certainly go a long way towards addressing the gaps in the implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates in peacekeeping operations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Pinheiro da Silva (Portugal) (*spoke in French*): I would like, first of all, to express our gratitude to France for organizing this very important debate on the protection of civilians. I also thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the President of the Central African Republic for their briefings.

Portugal aligns itself with the statement made by the Deputy Head of Delegation of the European Union and the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Switzerland, who spoke on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

Civilians affected by conflict situations continue to suffer the consequences of ongoing hostilities and are the main victims of violations of international humanitarian law as well as systematic human rights violations. Millions of people are exposed to violence on a daily basis, including sexual violence and exploitation, and they are forced to try to survive in very precarious conditions with respect to access to water, food, shelter and health services. In very many parts of the world, humanitarian access to the neediest populations is being deliberately blocked. Millions of children and young people are being deprived of education. Schools and hospitals have been subject to attack, and humanitarian workers are being targeted. Mass displacements that are due to fighting and violence are reaching levels without precedent since the end of the Second World War. We must stop this trend.

The inability to put an end to violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations, which, we must emphasize, may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, underscores the importance of giving priority to prevention as well as to the fight against impunity. We must continue our efforts to translate normative progress into concrete improvements with regard to the protection of civilians on the ground.

While Member States have the primary responsibility to fulfil their international obligations to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights and international humanitarian law, it is nevertheless crucial to strengthen accountability and improve compliance with international obligations by all parties to armed conflicts. Where national authorities fail to take the necessary measures to ensure such accountability, the Security Council may, if necessary, play a more proactive role. Portugal recalls that the International Criminal Court can play an important deterrent role, complementary to that of courts at the national level.

Undeniable progress has been made in recent decades with respect to the integration of a civilian protection component into United Nations peacekeeping mission mandates. However, the United Nations and its peacekeeping operations should work to keep pace with a changing world and the rapid transformation of the nature of conflict itself, and should anticipate the risks and needs with a view to finding more efficient approaches.

We recognize that the risks are higher and threats are now more global than in the past, and the operational environments in which United Nations missions are working are more complex and dangerous than ever. United Nations missions are increasingly having to struggle to protect their own personnel and innocent civilians on the ground in order to fulfil their mandates. The adjustment includes, inter alia, the United Nations having to endow its missions with modern and flexible capabilities, including through a human rights protection component, which helps to strengthen the performance of the peacekeeping operations themselves. In many respects, the preparation of peacekeepers is the cornerstone of the capacity-building process for missions in terms of the implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandate.

Portugal reiterates its commitment to continue to conduct training programmes for members of its national security and armed forces who have been deployed to international peacekeeping missions. Such training programmes cover such issues as gender equality, violence against women and girls, including all forms of sexual violence and gender-based violence, as well as trafficking in human beings.

Portugal has assumed its responsibilities with regard to the deployment of personnel and forces to United Nations peacekeeping operations and has already decided to strengthen its participation in that framework during the current year, 2016.

The results of the three review processes on United Nations peace and security efforts have led to certain clear conclusions and provided us with good avenues for the United Nations to explore in remaining relevant in the maintenance of peace and security. We believe that only a consistent focus on addressing root causes and intensifying political diplomacy efforts in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, together with the humanitarian aspect of development and peacebuilding, will effectively enhance respect for international humanitarian law and promote responsibility on the part of all parties, as well as humanitarian access to those in need, thereby strengthening collective efforts to address the mass movements of people we are witnessing every day.

Recalling the words of the Secretary-General on the current humanitarian situation, "given the blatant inhumanity," the international community can no longer remain an accomplice of collective apathy.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Gone (Côte D'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I would like, first of all, to congratulate the French presidency of the Security Council for holding this open debate on the important issue of the role of the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations. As in the previous debate, my delegation wishes to reassure you, Mr. President, of its support for the successful mandate of your presidency.

Civilians, in principle, are not fighters but nevertheless count among the largest number of casualties in armed conflict. They are subject to mass killings, rape and often forced displacement — in a word, all types of violence. Such violence against civilians prompted the Security Council, in 1999, to confer on a peacekeeping mission for the first-time a mandate to protect civilians — the United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone.

Since then, the issue of the protection of civilians in times of conflict has been regularly debated, including of course in the Security Council. As part of the progress made, my delegation places special emphasis in this debate on the adoption of the principle of the responsibility to protect at the 2005 World Summit of Heads of State and Government. Based on that principle, the Council aided my country in avoiding the worsening of the security situation of the civilian population during the armed conflict in 2005 in the country. By way of resolution 1975 (2011), the Security Council gave the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire the mandate necessary to ensure the full protection of civilians in the face of the unacceptable atrocities recorded regularly throughout the country. Nevertheless, the implementation of the principle of the responsibility to protect remains subject to significant challenges, such as the obligation to respect the sovereignty of a country and the need to reach consensus within the Security Council.

Having mentioned the issue of consensus within the Security Council, I cannot but help to address the question of the right of the veto. The use of the right of veto over time has shown how that instrument was sometimes the source of much inertia in the face of unsustainable tragedies and unbearable humanitarian crises. Faced with that major obstacle consisting of the inappropriate use of the veto, France and Mexico proposed, as part of the reform of the Security Council, an initiative that wouldentail the permanent members to voluntarily and collectively suspend their right to the veto in cases of observed mass crimes. My delegation is convinced of the enormous benefit to humankind that such an initiative could bring about, and therefore lends its full support for that proposal. Similarly, my country supports the code of conduct relative to the response of the Security Council to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, proposed by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group. We hope that the code will become more binding.

Protecting civilians in armed conflict in the context of peacekeeping operations also implies addressing the role of each actor. The deployment of a peacekeeping mission involves many actors. It is therefore important to undertake an organized effort and embrace shared responsibility. To that end, the Security Council must define its mandates in sufficiently clear and precise terms. The host Government should prioritize the protection of civilians and facilitate its implementation. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support should ensure that sufficient resources are deployed to carry out the mission well. Troop-contributing countries should ensure that their troops are not only well trained for the mission, but also in the areas of humanitarian law, international human rights law, refugee law and other international conventions dedicated to the protection of civilians in times of conflict. Ongoing evaluations of those responsibilities should also be an essential part of the protocol for the implementation of peacekeeping missions. In that context, my delegation welcomes the efforts of the Council, the Secretariat and the General Assembly in regularly reporting and taking initiatives on those issues and encourages them to continue to expand their commitment.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to say that the protection of civilians is the essence itself of peacekeeping operations in that it incorporates the goals of the Charter of the United Nations and is perceived by many citizens throughout the world, especially in countries in situations of conflict, as a mirror of efficiency and legitimacy, as well as the United Nations credibility as a defender of peace in its promotion of freedom and progress worldwide.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to thank the French presidency for convening this important open debate, as well as the briefers for their insightful statements. Azerbaijan welcomes the advancement of the protection-of-civilians agenda in the Security Council's work.

The intentional targeting of civilians remains one of the most alarming trends of contemporary armed conflicts. Civilians continue to suffer greatly from the horrible consequences of armed conflict. The fact that more than 60 million people were displaced as of the end of 2015 is the only fact needed to demonstrate the scale of the calamity of civilians. We appreciate the generosity of countries that are hosting large numbers of refugees.

My country commends the inclusion of the issue of forced displacement in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1) and the Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity.

The World Humanitarian Summit, recently held in Istanbul, should further encourage Member States and the whole international community to strengthen their efforts to reduce human suffering. We also look forward to the high-level meeting on large movements of refugees and migrants to be held on 19 September.

Azerbaijan also supports the growing awareness about the problem of internal displacement worldwide. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/447) acknowledges, strong protection frameworks are also needed for internally displaced persons. In that regard, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa — the first binding document on internal displacement — is especially commendable.

Azerbaijan strongly condemns all attacks on civilians and civilian structures in situations of armed conflict. We are deeply concerned by sexual violence in conflict, grave violations against children, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and attacks on humanitarian personnel, to name just a few.

The utmost attention should be given by all parties to conflict to complying with international humanitarian and human rights law and respecting the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. We echo the assessment of the Secretary-General that most civilian casualties and suffering could indeed be avoided if parties respected international humanitarian and human rights law. First and foremost, a lasting political solution should be achieved to put an end to the plight of civilians.

We recognize the tremendous role that United Nations peace operations have played in protecting civilians around the globe. We condemn all attacks on United Nations peacekeepers and pay tribute to those who lost their lives while accomplishing their mission. We cannot but agree with the recommendations offered in the Secretary-General's report that the Security Council should accord priority to the protection of civilians in the mandates of peace operations in situations requiring such protection. Mandates related to the protection of civilians should be clear, realistic and achievable, and peacekeepers must be fully equipped with all of the operational and logistical capabilities necessary to carry out their mandates. Furthermore, United Nations peacekeeping operations should complement the work undertaken by the Governments affected.

Unfortunately, my country has also been affected by the large-scale violations against its civilian population committed by the Republic of Armenia. The occupation of the Azerbaijani territories by Armenia has been accompanied by deliberate attacks and the killing of civilians, ethnic cleansing and forced displacement. Resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993) refer specifically to the displacement of civilians, attacks on civilians and bombardments of the territory of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani civilians continue to be targeted by Armenia. On 30 January last, I informed the Security Council of the cases of two Azerbaijani civilians, Mr. Shakhbaz Guliyev and Mr. Dilgam Askarov, who were taken hostage by Armenia while they were visiting the graves of their parents in the occupied region of Azerbaijan. I once again draw the attention of the Council to this issue, underlining the fact that those civilians were captured on the territory of their own country. Therefore, the illegal court proceedings sentencing Mr. Askarov to life imprisonment and Mr. Guliyev to 22 years in prison are null and void. Mr. President, I appeal again, through you, to the relevant international human rights bodies and humanitarian actors to intervene in order to achieve their release.

At the beginning of April, the Armenian armed forces, using heavy artillery and large-calibre weapons on their positions in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, increased the shelling of areas of Azerbaijan close to the front lines, purposely targeting densely populated areas. As a result, six civilians, including two children, were killed, and 33 wounded. Houses, schools, kindergartens and vital civilian infrastructure have been substantially damaged by the Armenian forces in order to create panic among the population and trigger massive displacement. A large number of civilians have been deprived of their basic rights to life, health, property and education. Many of the violations committed by Armenia against Azerbaijani civilians are tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Furthermore, despite the ceasefire agreed on 5 April, Armenia is now threatening Azerbaijan with the use of "dirty bombs". Hrant Bagratyan, a member of the Armenian Parliament and former Prime Minister of Armenia, has proudly stated that his country possesses a nuclear weapon.

As a result of the occupation of a large part of the territory of my country, hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis have found themselves in a mass displacement situation. The Secretary-General's report stresses the primary responsibility of national Governments in protecting and assisting refugees and internally displaced persons. In this regard, let me emphasize that Azerbaijan has demonstrated that it is possible to improve the living and housing conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) without undermining their return to their places of origin. My Government's efforts to tackle the problems of IDPs have been hailed by numerous international actors, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration and others. Azerbaijan remains fully committed to the return of IDPs, in safety and dignity, to their native lands.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Lithuania.

Ms. Murmokaitė (Lithuania): I thank you, Mr. President, for having organizing this important debate. Lithuania aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

Today's debate is a reminder once again that an ample knowledge base exists on what is needed to improve the protection of civilian populations by peacekeeping missions, including as reflected in the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/446) and last year's reviews on peacebuilding and women and peace and security.

As noted by many delegations today, clear, credible and achievable mandates matched by the reliable and readily availability of the necessary materiel, equipment and critical enablers; strong mission leadership and personal responsibilty; the pre-deployment training of troops, including on the protection of civilians; inclusion of thematic advisers on women, children and the protection of civilians in peacekeeping missions; a more robust, proactive protection posture; and the existence of specific protection-of-civilians strategies for each peacekeeping mission with a protection mandate all play an important role in the protection of civilians.

Furthermore, information obtained through modern technologies can greatly enhance a mission's situational awareness and intelligence-led decision-making. It provides advance warning of armed groups' movements and imminent attacks, thus enabling a faster response and pre-emptive action, which in turn helps to save civilian lives as well as the lives of peacekeepers themselves.

Against the backdrop of this extensive knowledge base and our experience on the ground, we believe that a sharper focus is needed on how existing norms are translated into more effective protection. Obstacles may vary, including a weak chain of command; lack of air lifts or capacity or fuel shortages that immobilize patrolling vehicles; insufficient support for human rights units; some 200 peacekeepers being sick with malaria at any given time, as was the case in the Central African Republic; protracted staff shortages; and lack of analytical or intelligence capacity within a mission. As a consequence, even the best resolutions and recommendations will be no worth no more than the paper they are written on if implementation falters for these various reasons.

The hurdles that missions face as well as good practices and the dissemination of lessons learned should be given greater attention in the Council's deliberations. Real interactive dialogues with force and police commanders, going well beyond once-a-year formal meetings, would facilitate the removal of existing obstacles and a better understanding the situation on the ground.

The protection of civilians, a difficult task in itself, will be even more complex without the buy-in of local authorities and populations. The effective protection of civilians and, for that matter, the safety of peacekeepers themselves depend also on close ties with and the trust of local communities, including women, youth and marginalized groups. Such trust-based relations provide peacekeepers with much-needed local intelligence, enable a better understanding of the specific vulnerabilities and needs of local communities and facilitate the crafting of specific, targeted and effective responses to the threats such communities face.

Nothing breaches this trust more than abuses perpetrated by peacekeepers themselves. Protectors turned into predators tarnish the good name of the thousands and thousands of United Nations peacekeepers who have served with dedication and, increasingly, at a risk to their own lives, including those who have paid the ultimate price for protecting others.

Those guilty of abuses should not be allowed to hide behind national jurisdictions to avoid justice. The onus is on the troop-contributing countries to bring the perpetrators to account.

We welcome the Secretary-General's strong response to the latest sexual exploitation and abuse scandal concerning the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and the concrete steps that have been taken to tackle the problem. The Council should also do its utmost to put an end to impunity. In this respect, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2272 (2016) in March this year and call for its full implementation.

At the same time, let us not forget that this particular ill is not new. The first widely publicized sexual exploitation and abuse cases date back to 1992, in Cambodia, and others followed. In March 2005, a a comprehensive strategy to eliminate future sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping operations was released, and yet here we are again. What use are reports if they are not implemented? We have to make sure that our attention span lasts well beyond the occurrence of a specific incident, and that reports and recommendations are put into action in a consistent and comprehensive manner. That is the only way we can ensure that 10 or 15 years from now United Nations peacekeeping will not go through yet another cycle of scandal and shame.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Nkoloi (Botswana): We wish France all the best during its presidency of the Council for this month. We also pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his briefing, and commend him for continuing to show commitment to the cause of civilians especially in conflict situations. We also welcome the other insightful briefings and comments we received this morning.

Botswana remains committed to the promotion of and respect for humanitarian principles, in accordance with international law and human rights law. As we have always maintained, we reiterate our long-held belief, which is shared by many, that States have the primary responsibility to protect their own populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is for this reason that Botswana continues to subscribe to the principle of the responsibility to protect as a natural framework to strengthen national sovereignty, while placing responsibility on those who have the power to protect and serve. It is in this regard that we reaffirm our abiding faith in the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as the various multilateral instruments under international humanitarian law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

With regard to the role of peacekeeping and other missions, we take note of the deployment of peacekeeping operations and special political missions in many countries around the world as the most significant action taken by the Security Council. The proliferation of such missions illustrates just how instrumental they are in the maintenance of international peace and security. We recognize the complex and violent environments in which peacekeeping personnel operate. We also share the view that care and attention should be given to strengthening missions' capabilities to effectively discharge their mandates. To achieve that, we believe that adequate the training and capacity-building of personnel before, during and after deployment are absolute necessities.

It is the view of my delegation that before conflict erupts and perhaps escalates beyond proportion, there are signs and signals pointing to a potential cause. In this case, we believe that those within the vicinity of the potential problem must be able to detect early warning signals so as to enable the exploration of preventive measures through an inclusive and mutually acceptable process. It is the duty not just of all parties involved in conflict but also that of the State to ensure that measures are taken to protect human rights and humanitarian law. It is in this regard that we agree with the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, among others, that all troops must be trained in the protection of civilians prior to their deployment to missions, and that they must not hesitate to take action to protect civilians in accordance with the rules of engagement.

We must increase our efforts to implement resolution 1325 (2000) in order to protect women in armed conflict, as well as to involve them in all levels and processes of mediation, peacekeeping and peace maintenance, as well as reconstruction and development. As history has shown, whenever there is conflict there is likelihood of abuse of the rights of populations, especially the vulnerable groups. Quite often, there is systematic gender-based violence, sexual enslavement, rape and the enlisting of children in armed conflict by those who wield power. In most cases, it is opportunistic militias, rebels, wayward Government forces and sometimes leaders who use brutal force, rape, massacre and repression as weapons of war. Where governance institutions have collapsed, impunity reigns. Women, girls and boys always bear the brunt of all these atrocities.

My delegation views the commission of these crimes very seriously and condemns them in all their forms and manifestations. It is in this respect that we have always called for those responsible for perpetrating human rights abuses to be held accountable for their deeds. The various multilateral criminal justice tribunals that exist in the world must therefore be explored to bring justice to the victims of these crimes.

As a friend and supporter of the International Criminal Court (ICC), we have no doubt that the ICC serves as the only permanent court of last resort for victims of crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. We believe that the millions of victims across the world deserve dignity and justice. To this end, we must not fail in our moral duty to offer them protection in the face of impunity. We call on the Security Council to continue to support the ICC in its quest to safeguard the rights of victims.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm Botswana's support for the international community's efforts to protect innocent civilians during armed conflict. I wish to also stress the importance of consolidating and ensuring the implementation of existing normative frameworks on the protection of civilians in country-specific situations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Ceylan (Turkey): I would like to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing this debate. I also express our appreciation to His Excellency the President of the Central African Republic and the other briefers for their insightful statements this morning.

The trends in global threats against humankind, particularly the growing scale of violence and persistent violations of the international humanitarian law, compel us in the first place to consider the protection of civilians as one of the biggest challenges to international peace. It should be our major concern that, today, civilians account for the vast majority of casualties resulting from armed conflict. The indiscriminate targeting of hospitals, schools, market places, holy shrines and even camps for internally displaced persons, as well as such heinous terrorist tactics as suicide-bombings, have devastating effects that neither international law nor any other moral value can tolerate. The perpetrators of such acts should be held accountable.

Forced displacement, starvation, sexual abuse and slavery are systematically used as warfare tactics affecting the fate of the most vulnerable, namely, children, women and the elderly. This dark picture makes the protection of civilians a legal and moral duty for the international community.

Turkey acknowledges that the primary responsibility lies with States to protect their citizens. Turkey is fully committed to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, and lives up to its commitments under international law, international humanitarian law and refugee law, where applicable. Turkey has long played a unique role in its region in alleviating human suffering. In that regard, Turkey is currently hosting millions of displaced people on its soil and spares no effort to meet their shelter, food and education needs.

The number of people in need of international humanitarian assistance has tripled over the past decade. The international community cannot overcome this challenge without effective cooperation and collective action. The first World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul few weeks ago, was a ground-breaking development in that regard. To address the root causes of crises and end human suffering, Turkey — in line with its commitments — will continue to work together with the United Nations, Member States and relevant stakeholders.

In the context of peace operations, the United Nations must assume its responsibilities where States fail to protect their own citizens, in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter. Turkey adheres to the peacekeeping principles of impartiality, the consent of host State and the non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate. The protection of civilians in armed conflict is consistent with these principles. Moreover, as the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations states, "those principles ... should never be an excuse for failure to protect civilians" (see *S/2015/446, p. 12*).

In conflict-affected societies, Governments may lack the necessary capacity to secure the lives and dignity of their citizens. As a matter of fact, that is the case in most of the places where United Nations peacekeeping missions are deployed. Political determination and institutional strength are fundamental for the effective protection of civilians effectively. Today, 10 out of the 16 peacekeeping missions operate under specific mandates to protect civilians.

In those missions, United Nations peacekeepers courageously assume their duties, under the most challenging conditions, although they themselves are increasingly targeted by armed groups. The problem is growing worse, and United Nations peacekeeping operations should therefore pursue comprehensive strategies to help nations increase their resilience in crisis situations.

The role of United Nations police is critical in building capacities for protecting civilians and upholding the rule of law. As the 2016 report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (see A/70/19) stresses, providing peacekeeping operations with clearly defined mandates, objectives and command structures, adequate resources and training based on a realistic assessment of the situation are key factors in the effective implementation of protection duties in the context of peacekeeping operations.

More broadly speaking, the United Nations has a role to play in preventing the ongoing attacks against civilians, not only in specific peacekeeping settings but also in crisis-prone situations where special political missions are deployed. To that end, the United Nations should make effective use of early-warning mechanisms, preventive diplomacy and mediation as necessary tools for preventing conflict and thus human suffering.

Turkey believes that the worsening circumstances and the inclusion of protection mandates may require a change in the posture of peace operations. In that regard, we appreciate United Nations efforts to develop strong guidelines for ensuring the protection of civilians. The report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians contains important recommendations in that regard (S/2016/447).

In times of turmoil peacekeepers are seen as the sole hope of defenceless peoples. Without undermining that noble calling, the United Nations must, however, ensure that the peacekeepers tasked to protect civilians do not become a threat to them. The United Nations must, therefore, rigorously implement the zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse cases in which its personnel are involved. It is Turkey's expectation that those utterly disgraceful acts will cease and that the perpetrators will be prosecuted.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of Ukraine has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I know that it is late, but my statement will not take long. Today, the Russian delegation once again resorted to a flat lie, this time stating that the Council did not receive any request from Ukraine on the deployment of a peacekeeping operation.

Just for the record, Ukraine officially approached the Council at the highest level, as well as the Secretary-General, with such a request on at least two occasions. Relevant appeals on the part of Ukraine, the President and the National Security and Defence Council, as well as the Parliament, were accompanied by letters from the Ukrainian Minister for Foreign Affairs and officially transmitted to the United Nations by our Mission in February and March last year.

Let me recall a quote from an address by the President of Ukraine to the Security Council and the Secretary-General, adopted by the Ukrainian parliament on 17 March 2015.

> "On behalf of Ukraine I address the Secretary-General and the Security Council of the United Nations to initiate appropriate procedures for the deployment of a United Nations international peacekeeping operation in the territory of Ukraine, with the exact modalities to be defined in consultations with the Ukrainian side, in accordance with established practice. In particular, I request that a preliminary assessment mission be dispatched to Ukraine in order to assess the situation and put forward recommendations for consideration by the Security Council." (*S/2015/225, p. 4.*)

One can ask oneself: if that is not a request addressed to the Council, then what is it? Yet the Russian delegation may try to deny even that. If so, let me recall that the aforementioned address by the President, adopted by the Parliament of Ukraine and addressed to the Council, was distributed as an official United Nations document on 2 April 2015 under the symbol S/2015/225.

It is highly unusual for a Council member to deny the existence of a document that can be found in the online United Nations document system. I would therefore like to ask the Secretariat to distribute hard copies of the Ukrainian request. For ease of use and reference, we will also upload that official Security Council document to our Mission's web page.

Moving on now to the substance of today's debate, I wish to inform the Council that, as the Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna was informed yesterday, Russian-backed separatist forces continue to use advanced weapons and equipment to put civilians at risk in eastern Ukraine. According to monitors of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, residents of Donetsk said that separatist fighters position themselves on the roofs of their homes, launch mortar attacks and then flee, leaving civilians to face defensive return fire from Ukrainian soldiers.

Recently, Russian-backed separatists attacked Ukrainian positions from a water-treatment plant, using chlorine canisters stored there as a deterrent to Ukrainian return fire, as the rupture of the canisters would cause a local environmental disaster. There is no justification for such acts, which intentionally place civilians and critical civilian infrastructure at risk.

The meeting rose at 6.55 p.m.